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# SOME SOLDIER POETS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

POETRY

1899. THE VINEDRESSER AND OTHER POEMS
1901. APHRODITE AGAINST ARTEMIS
1903. ABSALOM
1903. DANÄE
1905. THE LITTLE SCHOOL
1906. POEMS
1911. MARIAMNE
1911. A SICILYAN IDYLL
1914. THE SEA IS KIND

PROSE

1899. THE CENTAUR AND THE BACCHANT FROM THE FRENCH BY MAURICE DE GUERIN
1900. ALTDORFER
1904. DURER
1906. CORREGGIO
1910. ART AND LIFE (FLAUBERT AND BLAKE)
1915. HARK TO THESE THREE

# SOME SOLDIER POETS

BY

T. STURGE MOORE

NEW YORK
HARCOURT, BRACE AND HOWE
1920

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

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# NOTE

GRATEFUL acknowledgment is due to the courtesy with which authors or their representatives and their publishers have most generously permitted me to quote—Lord Desborough from Julian Grenfell's poem; Mr Edward Marsh and Messrs Sidgwick & Jackson from Rupert Brooke's poems; Captains Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves, Lieutenants Robert Nichols and Richard Aldington and Mr Laurence Binyon from their own poems; Bishop Frodsham from those of Lieutenant Harvey, then a prisoner; Professor W. R. Sorley from Captain Sorley's, Mrs Edward Thomas and Mrs R. E. Vernède from their husbands' poems, Lord Dunsany and Mr Herbert Jenkins from those of Francis Ledwidge, and Mr Charles Louis Seeger and Messrs Constable from Alan Seeger's poems.

# INTRODUCTION

THESE essays are occasional. They are incomplete and tentative, as must be every reply to a fortuitous demand. I have not chosen my themes by any deep affinity or because I had a native bent for studying them, but because they were thrust before me and some of my thoughts flocked out to meet each.

I sketched characters based on analysis of work, not on information about authors, yet have since learned that some of these literary portraits seemed good likenesses to the friends of the man portrayed, and the friends of other poets have desired to see their literary characters sketched by me.

Young poets are old-fashioned, like Nature herself; they have usually not yet acquired the professional desire to be in advance of the public. Nothing seems hackneyed to genius, and youth is perhaps half genius.

What a work is *not* is always more obvious than what it is, as critics are never weary of proving. I have tried to build with positive qualities, and to obtain relief by laying on shadows lightly, as the best topographical draughtsmen did their pearly washes of diluted Indian ink.

What is poetry? Why are so many young people tempted to try their hands at it? Wrong answers to these questions are naturally more numerous and fashionable than right answers. But we can never see poetry in relation to national life until we get hold of right answers. Poetry is a creation or discovery in the use of words that wakes or strengthens emotion in us, thus enlarging consciousness. The poet is not full of emotions and perceptions that need expressing, as a vat is full of grapes, though no doubt human nature—complete, ideal—is latent in him. He is, like all young creatures, playful. He plays with language, attracted by its beauties and

possibilities, and in doing so he does for himself what afterwards his poems do for us—he awakens or creates emotions in his heart that it knew little or nothing of before, and as he continues he clarifies, strengthens and adds to them.

The Muse is light-footed, but does not, like Poe, consider a poem more essentially poetical for being short. No, as children continue their Indians and Pirates from day to day and from one holidays to another, she sustains the poet's interest in Arcady or Babylon, in murderous king and incestuous queen, for years together, and renews it from age to age; yet she often welcomes novel themes. She loves to defeat the "proud limitary" theorist who is for a hole-in-the-corner business, with one properly labelled ware of a high quality. One generation having deified classical example, she prompts the next to scoff at "monstrous Milton"; yet will very likely lead the scoffer's son back to that blind man's feet. In fact, like children, she hates a declared purpose; for the game is best when the players forget themselves entirely in it, even though it be preaching, for *then* she loves a sermon. The poet is only a poet when he lays aside the interests of his life among his neighbours and shares her free absorption over anything or everything. To live poetry as Rupert Brooke dreamed of doing is impossible, for though Life may follow, she can never overtake those immaterial feet. The welfare of one man, of one neighbourhood, of one nation or period, is a pettifogging affair when past and future lie open. If the poet treats of his own love he must be careful not clearly to distinguish her from Helen of Troy, or should, at least, give us the illusion that they are equally real to him. That is why failure in love and war is so much more inspiring to the poet than success; when the real world has rejected a man he feels freer in the Muses' house; he no longer has any interests that conflict with theirs.

# INTRODUCTION

Poetry is more profound and significant than prose, wiser and weightier, at once more primitive and more refined; for the fashion of this world passes, but the moods of that remain. They build with durable, precious materials which, though invisible, are stronger and tougher than steel, and more difficult than radium to account for. The poet is not the odd sheepish person whom his friends know, but the worthy playmate of Polyhymnia. In fact the wider the difference the freer the poet is from personal taint. Some "nice man" was Shakespeare to his London, but our Shakespeare was and still is more imposing than Lord Verulam, yet never could be met in any street.

What is poetry? Why do youths love it? To read verse and watch young men answers both questions, but who shall sum those answers up in words? One at present fashionable answer may be worth combating so as to set off the largeness and vigour of that apparent truth which defeats the tongue. Why do young men write verse? They want to express themselves, their own sense of things. This answer only shows how deeply the fallacy of impressionism has sophisticated modern æsthetic thought. No one escapes. The impressionist looks upon his individual peculiarities as the source of value. He offers to exploit the Peru of his mind for the benefit of the world. He would work it with scientific nicety, or else record the whimseys of feeling, seeing and thinking to which he is subject when most alarmingly unlike other men, and thinks thus to add new facts to our knowledge, enlarge our experience. He does, but Apollo is not interested in his wonders as glimpsed from a garret. "Intolerably severe" he has frowned on these votaries who are content with what *they* see. He smiles on those who, forgetting themselves, follow his splendour into the open. Their worship can never enough divest itself, not only of walls and roof, but of coat and shirt, so as to feel his glory with every pore.

Whereas those others try to frame their sense of him, which is small, these flatter him with a whole-hearted imitation, creating little gardens with stick and ink and paper as he creates the world for joy with light.

More minds are capable of an interest in persons than in beauty, as the appetite for gossip and scandal shows. The impressionist theory was bound to catch on; it panders to so common a weakness. "Know thyself!" "Be true to your own experience." Yes, but not because you are you, or it is yours, but because you are *not* adequate, it can*not* suffice, and to realise these limits till they ache is to extend them, throw them off and enlarge your life. The difference of attitude is enormous, far more real than any that can be drawn between romantic and classical or realist and idealist. The artist never does express himself; but, in trying to create objects, a by-product of mannerisms and shortcomings piles up like a heap of shavings, and this distinguishes his work from that of other artists. The poet who is keen about a poem and the poet who is anxious about his reputation are two persons, though like light and darkness they may alternately occupy the same room; one casts the other out. The master draws importance from the masterpiece, not this from him: his glory is a reflex light from its worth.

But do I not in sketching these characters truckle with this vice? A character is formed by a transparent and elastic envelope of limitations like a soap-bubble; it is easy to attribute those iridescent hues to that tegument of defect, but they are due to the form which the energy within supports. This escapes; a slop of soapy water falls; so when life evades, the body caves in and moulders. The hope which is my excuse is that I have focused attention on no slimy limitations but on the shape bestowed by that expansive energy.

Life is impersonal except while prisoned in some alien material, to which it gives as perfectly as possible an im-

mortal form. At least it is safest to think of it as impersonal until we can follow it out of one form into another: at present it disappears and reappears, like but not necessarily the same. I treat of poets, not of persons. Poetry is a form of vitality due to the fact that language can be filled with significance in such a way as to catch the light and appear transformed in texture and value. The poet's words are mere words, nevertheless; we all use and misuse them. His success is limited by their defects, just as it has always been seconded by the energy with which uncountable minds have charged them. So the poem has a distinct character, a distinct life, and a distinct fate, fuller than the poet's in some respects, narrower in others. It too is a bubble into which life passes through the artist as through a pipe often cracked, choked or faulty; besides the materials he works with, the soap is not all good, there may be too much or too little water, and at last when the perfect globe sails away nobody happens to be looking. The game is one of many hazards. Theorists insist that only those bubbles that sport a certain blue or green or purple are true art. But no dye, no pigment helps; and a more generously endowed faculty discovers that a change in the angle of regard can awaken any of the seven hues on all that float the air; for not subject and sentiment but form and texture import; emotions and themes are only tabooed by prejudice. The rainbow admiration even hovers over the bowl of suds, and any bubble round enough might be induced to travel alone if chivied about with a conviction equal to that of the moment's fashion. History is draughty, capriciously so, and tomorrow will not correct all the mistakes of to-day. Chance often defeats fine work while it treasures trash. These poets have been chosen at random out of the hundreds that are launched by the Press. I cannot pretend to any assurance that I have chosen the largest or the most prosperous voyagers. Twenty years ago the public gave

comparatively little attention to youngsters and their poetry. Perhaps the public attitude has changed more than young men and their work. First the turn of the century made the future seem more interesting because it had got a new name; lately these boys became heroes, defenders, creditors, and people were anxious to pay them with sympathy and understanding. This more human attitude no doubt exhilarates the poets. Manly youth during these last four years, like a Niagara, has been thundering down into an abyss and the few bubbles whose beauty floats upward are pathetically disproportionate to its volume and sound. To realise the cost of the forms of social life yet experimented in by man is to turn in horror from the past towards the future. But only by gazing steadily back can we discern what life has produced and therefore may again shape to warrant this outlay. Art and poetry, to such a steady gaze, make up perhaps half of that acceptable excuse for man's existence. Nay, more than half; for heroism, personal charm, beauty, holiness, wisdom and even knowledge live again reflected and absorbed into works of art, and only so find adequate remembrance.

## *POSTSCRIPT*

The war is over, and I add to these studies of Soldier Poets a lecture on The Best Poetry read before the Royal Society of Literature on 27th March 1912, in hopes of balancing and completing their significance. Young poets have frequently produced perfect things, but these have rarely been of any length. Much practice and familiarity with the possibilities of words and thoughts are required in complex creations. In discovering The Best Poetry the qualities of great works must be scanned in due relation to the excellences of lyrics, and thus, perhaps, this examination of work by necessity immature may be thrown into perspective and refresh without confusing.

# JULIAN GRENFELL

THE war has confounded matter-of-fact calculation and made most people aware of unprized volcanic resources in human nature. However, some men, many young men, have always felt moved, supported or opposed by agencies of which they could give no consistent account to the seasoned worldling. Rhythms and cadences which express or seem to lead on to the expression of life's hidden value take possession of young minds, control and contort their speech into jangling rhyme which, since the war, has acquired increasing popularity, till critics remember how during the wars of Napoleon verse sold better than prose, and wonder whether this may not happen again. The customs and cares of civil life dishearten and depress, and a run on poetry would be proof of reawakened sensibility. Let us hope that England, where life has seemed both stablest and stalest, is to be refreshed by a wave of finer enthusiasm. The young will feel it first, for they are never stale or established. Of all the young men whom England has sent out to fight, he who has produced the best poem seems to have least hesitated, answering the call to fight with ecstatic joy.

Captain the Hon. Julian H. F. Grenfell, D.S.O., was born on 30th March 1888, obtained a commission in the 1st Royal Dragoons in September, 1909, and died of wounds on 26th May 1915, having written the following poem about a month earlier :—

## INTO BATTLE

THE naked earth is warm with Spring,
And with green grass and bursting trees
Leans to the sun's gaze glorying,
And quivers in the sunny breeze;

And life is Colour and Warmth and Light,
And a striving evermore for these;
And he is dead who will not fight,
And who dies fighting has increase.

The fighting man shall from the sun
Take warmth, and life from glowing earth;
Speed with the light-foot winds to run
And with the trees to newer birth;
And find, when fighting shall be done,
Great rest, and fulness after dearth.

All the bright company of Heaven
Hold him in their bright comradeship,
The Dog star, and the Sisters Seven,
Orion's belt and sworded hip:

The woodland trees that stand together,
They stand to him each one a friend;
They gently speak in the windy weather;
They guide to valley and ridges end.

The kestrel hovering by day,
And the little owls that call by night,
Bid him be swift and keen as they,
As keen of ear, as swift of sight.

The blackbird sings to him: "Brother, brother,
If this be the last song you shall sing,
Sing well, for you may not sing another;
Brother, sing."

In dreary doubtful waiting hours,
Before the brazen frenzy starts,
The horses show him nobler powers;—
O patient eyes, courageous hearts!

And when the burning moment breaks,
And all things else are out of mind,
And only joy of battle takes
Him by the throat and makes him blind,

Through joy and blindness he shall know,
Not caring much to know, that still
Nor lead nor steel shall reach him, so
That it be not the Destined Will.

The thundering line of battle stands,
And in the air Death moans and sings;
But Day shall clasp him with strong hands,
And Night shall fold him in soft wings.

Many readers are exhilarated by this who cannot be at the pains to ravel out its secret; and I propose to help them, that the impression may last longer and satisfy more completely. Young Grenfell exults at fulfilling an inborn promise. At last he feels free to be what instinct and capacity make him; general consent and his own conscience permit him to kill and to die. The ecstasy is like that of married love: a fundamental instinct can be gratified untaxed by inward loss or damage and with the approval of mankind. Harmony between impulse and circumstance creates this joy; but not only is it more complex than that of the young male stag who attacks the leader of the herd, there is in it an element of quite a different order, a sense that wrong within can be defeated by braving evil abroad. The strain between worldly custom and that passion for good which begets spiritual insight, finds relief in fighting, looks for peace in death. Only the noblest spirits when young so intolerably feel this strain that they welcome such an end as delicious satisfaction. Acquiescence in evil seems to them too high a price to pay for life. As though it were a devil, they would cast out all complicity with it from themselves as from others. This is the focus of their activity and until it is found they have no peace. Shelley is recognised as a type of the young poet, and this eagerness to attack evil in the world and this readiness to die characterise him, though his weapon was the pen and he faced death

in crazy boats and fever-stricken hovels and not in battle.

The intimate delicacy and justness of this marvellous lyric will appear more brilliantly yet if we contrast the aspects which arouse its eloquence with those more commonly selected when the theme is war.

Throughout the poem no hint is given of the nature of the enemy; he does not proclaim, as so many have done, that he fights for right or against tyranny. He does not himself look forward to tasting the fruits of victory; he accepts death as the natural necessary reward of taking up arms. Even in peace he had chosen to serve by being ready to fight. Yet he does not cry up devotion to England. You will say *his* was obvious. That is just it, true poetry does not say what is unnecessary.

That a young man of this gentleness should be glad both to kill and be killed shows that the martyr and the soldier are not opposite types but stand before the deeply moved conscience as equal heroes. Both are finest when each most resembles the other: the martyr, courageous, unflinching, capable of detachment and courtesy to the last: the soldier, conscientious, humane and unaggressive: St Stephen and St George. The quality of emotion in these stanzas will serve as a touchstone to imperialist and pacifist theories. True peace is not signed by governments, but is something never yet achieved on earth. That so-called peace which preceded the war must have created the exultant relief to have done with it which this young man felt. And we know he was right, we know its foul shame, we know how unworthy it was of the name we so fondly gave it. Peace indeed!

The sanity of a true inspiration is miraculous and avoids errors which we all breathe and utter, and yet does not fall into the opposition of that half illumination which, like a bee on a window-pane, angrily buzzes itself to death because it sees but cannot enter the light. Neither is

it passive, disclaiming part and parcel in humanity's tragedy, as though there were any other means of support than man's widespread good will. Men and nations, we all depend for what we are permitted to be on friendliness and co-operation.

The senses both of mind and body are tender, all callousness impairs them. The slaves of machinery, with their *real-politik* and subserviency to fact, are in all countries striving to stifle liberty, poetry, joy. But kindness is stronger than discipline and courtesy more victorious than munitions.

Since I wrote this a pamphlet has been published with extracts from Julian Grenfell's letters; these strengthen and endorse the impression received from his poem. He was a born fighter: there is a wonderful description of a boxing match he had with a champion at Johannesburg, too long to quote here but very worth reading. After he had been knocked down three times he remarks that his "head was clearing." Yet he can also write:

"I hate material books, centred on whether people are successful. I like books about artists and philosophers and dreamers, anybody who is just a little bit off his dot."

Success in this present world is a little incompatible with real success; one is a trifle beside the mark of the other even when they seem to coincide.

"I longed to be able to say that I liked it, after all that one has heard of being under fire for the first time. But it is beastly. I pretended to myself for a bit that I liked it, but it was no good; it only made me careless and unwatchful and self-absorbed; but when one acknowledged to oneself that it was beastly, one became all right again and cool."

So his head began to clear again just in time.

[1] *Julian Grenfell: A Memoir.* By Viola Meynell. Burns & Oates. 1s.

"Here we are in the burning centre of it all, and I would not be anywhere else for a million pounds and the Queen of Sheba."

Consciously or unconsciously he repeats the sentiment that Shakespeare put into the mouth of Henry V. at Agincourt and Sir Henry Newbolt into Nelson's in his *Admirals All.* That sentiment characterises the born leader: when facing danger he feels that he is where he can best prove what he is. He felt "utterly ashamed" of himself when he had met a German officer prisoner with a scowl, the other looked so "proud, so resolute, smart and confident in his hour of bitterness." This instant challenge and rebuke of himself was akin to his mastery and initiative. He begged to be allowed to go out into "No Man's Land" stalking Germans, and was refused. At last:

"They told me to take a section with me, and I said I would rather cut my throat and have done with it. So they let me go alone."

His experiences are as good reading as the fight at Johannesburg, but too long to quote.

"I got back at a sort of galloping crawl and sent a message to the 10th that the Germans were moving up their way in some numbers. . . . They made quite a ridiculous fuss about me stalking, and getting the message through. . . . It was up to someone to do it instead of leaving it all to the Germans and losing two officers a day through snipers. All our men have started it now. It is a popular amusement."

But first is first to-day just as when David met Goliath. A piece of bursting shell has deprived us of a great leader, with the characteristics of the finest kings of men. And though wealthy enough to travel with dogs and horses wherever he went, he could not bear to think that a friend

had deserted the Socialist cause out of respect for "the loaves and the fishes." This friend writes:

"I don't suppose many people knew what an ardent love he had for honesty of purpose and intellectual honesty, and what sacrifices he made for them—sacrifices of peace-of-mind abhorrent to most Englishmen . . . caused himself no end of worry and unhappiness."

Yes, facing discomfort clears the will, as facing physical danger clears the head, and wrong within can be defeated by braving evil abroad. And now while intellectual honesty is at a premium I will confess that the last two lines of his *Into Battle* always disappoint me. They ring hollow and empty; it is as though he had been disturbed and scribbled in haste something that looks like an end but is not, and never given his mind to the poem again.

The other poems published since are slighter in mood and more boyish in execution. Though they are not bad, they are not good enough to enhance the effect of *Into Battle*.

Physically, mentally and morally splendid, he might seem to have done little in this world but be and be destroyed. Yet to have been, and to be known to have been such as he was, may well in time seem one of the grandest facts of these times. Such admiration as we owe to him is an experience as rare as it is beneficent, and will outlast a vast number of topics and crazes. Two phases of his worth he revealed even to those who never met him: the one in his poem, the other in his letters; and they tally as the like aspects have rarely tallied in other men. This proves the density of the integrity that was destroyed by a fragment of iron. He lay wounded a few weeks before he ceased to suffer.

The worst horror of modern war is not the vastness of its destructions but the number of spirits whom it enslaves to machinery; and in this it closely resembles

modern peace. The plough lacerates the turf, many lowly and lovely lives are sacrificed that wheat may be sown and a taller, straighter growth raised to sustain a higher pulse of life. But how many of our modern machines create what is useless or harmful, at the expense of the best life both of those whose profit is intended and of those whom they exploit! Is there so much choice between the horrors of war and those of peace when they are truly estimated that the pacifist should prefer them or the imperialist wish to re-establish them? That men should be forced by the self-seeking of others to linger in want or to die in cruel torture is equally abhorrent. The hope of all generous spirits is to have done by means of the war with the peace that they have known and to usher in a better order. And Grenfell cheers this hope as few can, foreshowing a better proportioned life. The limpidity and strength of his emotion, though it creates beauty and reveals wisdom, was seconded by no matured art; yet those who have this at command are so liable to fail just where he succeeds, in sureness of aim.

# RUPERT BROOKE

RUPERT BROOKE was beginning to be known both as a poet and for rare personal beauty when his death at the age of twenty-eight, on his way out to the Dardanelles, set him beside Sir Philip Sidney as scholar, soldier, poet and patriot.

There was a factitious element in this burst of acclamation, something we can hope the man himself would have responded less and less to. Though the beauty of his person and the daintiness of his verse and the gentleness of his manners made worldlings eager to spoil him, he was not averse to hard work, and maintained a certain reserve which augured a better future for him than that of a darling of fashion. He and his young Cambridge friends of both sexes seem to have cherished an ideal of free comradeship, and to have realised it in an uncommon degree without paying toll in scandals to the censorious world. In like manner his verse, though playful and ornamental, so toys with philosophical inquiries as to hint at latent resources of graver power. Such problems as whether any communions are possible, whether I can know you or you me, and whether existence is absolutely conditioned by time and space, are whimsically put and illustrated in such instances as a fish, or a single moment of one particular tea in a dining-room.

"Oh! never fly conceals a hook,
Fish say, in the Eternal Brook,
But more than mundane weeds are there,
And mud, celestially fair;
Fat caterpillars drift around,
And Paradisal grubs are found;
Unfading moths, immortal flies,
And the worm that never dies.
And in that heaven of all their wish,
There shall be no more land, say fish."

Only an arch levity saves this from being trite. I should have to quote too much before I could illustrate his amusement with the possible delusions of men's thoughts. But occasionally a serious shudder is glimpsed behind the smiling mask.

"And suddenly there's no meaning in our kiss
And your lit upward face grows, where we lie,
Lonelier and dreadfuller than sunlight is,
And dumb and mad and eyeless like the sky."

His sovran preoccupation, that which inspired his best poems, was the least suitable for one whom some have imagined cut out for the part of a modern Antinous, to whom the élite of London, both male and female, should corporately play the part of a platonic Hadrian. His thoughts flocked about death. At first he dallies with them.

"Oh! Death will find me, long before I tire
Of watching you; and swing me suddenly
Into the shade and loneliness and mire
Of the last land! There, waiting patiently,
One day, I think I'll find a cool wind blowing,
See a slow light across the Stygian tide,
And hear the dead about me stir, unknowing,
And tremble. And I shall know that you have died
And watch you, a broad-browed and smiling dream,
Pass light as ever, through the lightless host,
Quietly ponder, start, and sway, and gleam—
Most individual and bewildering ghost!—
And turn and toss your brown delightful head
Amusedly, among the ancient Dead."

But his contemplation of possible significance in life's end passes gradually into serener moods.

CLOUDS

Down the blue night the unending columns press
In noiseless tumult, break and wave and flow,
Now tread the far South, or lift rounds of snow
Up to the white moon's hidden loveliness.

Some pause in their grave wandering comradeless,
And turn with profound gesture vague and slow,
As who would pray good for the world, but know
Their benediction empty as they bless.
They say that the Dead die not, but remain
Near to the rich heirs of their grief and mirth.
I think they ride the calm mid-heaven, as these,
In wise majestic melancholy train,
And watch the moon and the still-raging seas,
And men, coming and going on the earth."

At last in his finest poem these reveries rise to an expression worthy of the classics of our language.

THE DEAD (1914)

THESE hearts were woven of human joys and cares,
Washed marvellously with sorrow, swift to mirth,
The years had given them kindness. Dawn was theirs,
And sunset and the colours of the earth.
These had seen movement, and heard music; known
Slumber and waking; loved; gone proudly friended;
Felt the quick stir of wonder; sat alone;
Touched flowers and furs, and cheeks. All this is ended.
There are waters blown by changing winds to laughter
And lit by the rich skies all day. And after,
Frost, with a gesture, stays the waves that dance
In wandering loveliness. He leaves a white
Unbroken glory, a gathered radiance,
A width, a shining peace, under the night.[1]

The remoteness and impersonality of this sadness, with the wide horizon and unifying candour, compel our deepest welcome. The effort to startle, allure, or amuse has vanished. No doubt the devotion to England, dwelt on in the other sonnets of the 1914 sequence, won more of the praise; but some who acutely felt his charm were conscious of a falsetto emphasis in those efforts to say the

[1] Quotations by permission of Brooke's literary representative, E. Marsh, Esq.

right thing at the right moment, although his death had doubled their appeal.

Poems demand to be read aloud by someone who has instinctive sympathy for the pace, tone and address proper to each. For many the interest must at first, and perhaps long, lie in the mental attitude revealed. Nor is this attitude a small or insignificant part of the impression which ought to be made by poetry—the most perfect speech of man, as it has been called—that is, the utterance to which the greatest number of his faculties combined in harmonious balance contribute. The way the speaker has borne himself, and the way he now confronts the world, must influence this harmony profoundly. His words betray his past and present to those whose attention is sufficiently continuous and searching, by indices that lie around and beyond the mere meaning of the sentences used—indices gleaned from their interplay and the degree in which each alters and defines the whole sense, as much as from the melody of the words or the rhythm of their just enunciation. This aroma, which arises from the organism of the meaning, translators can often convey to other nations; for the beauties of diction and rhythm, many among those who speak the same tongue should accept the verdict of trained appreciators. Now melody and rhythm often engross trained apprehension, and the less learned may therefore be more ready to note the grave drift of wonder which flows beneath the playful, indulged and indulgent surface of Brooke's art, than were his æsthetic admirers. Those eyes which gaze out from behind his poems have been fascinated by the contrast between the momentousness of life to us, and our strangely casual relation to its vast movement, which is not at all suited to nourish our hopes of divining the whole truth. Those eyes seem to dance; for has not methodic inquiry begun to reconsider what it had denounced as entirely fabulous? Death's door, which Spencer, Renan and

Nietzsche regarded as finally closed, is well-nigh ajar once more. Brooke's amused alertness is like that of a child who watches a door emphatically closed upon a cupboard declared to be empty by grown-up assurance; it creaks, and mysteriously seems to stir; other little boys and girls, his playmates, pay scant attention to its unaccountable behaviour. He himself thinks he has seen that the cupboard was vacant, and yet, in spite of himself, is fascinated by the possibility of a ghostly opener. Smiling over his own fancies, Brooke seems to have sat half abstracted at a pleasure party till the outbreak of war. He immediately volunteered, though delicate and but recently returned from a voyage across America and through the Pacific Islands in search of health—health which finally failed him before he had struck a blow or fired a shot, though he had been to Antwerp with the naval expedition.

To-day he stands with Julian Grenfell, as I see them through their work, in attitudes that suggest statues more worthy of the acropolis of the supreme city than any of those which the public figures of these times have yet assumed. What is done is always faulty, but what is intended may sometimes be divinely fair; and early death leaves this untampered with. Finely wrought bronze, these youths and their peers from other lands stand in that lofty garden above the ideal town, listening to their "friends" the trees. At their feet children play on the grass, and young girls crumble bread to lure doves down from the heroic shoulders; while for the men who glance at them in passing the inspiration of their bearing is all that remains of the Great War. The ardent Grenfell leaps forward; Brooke with smiling grace escapes from the uncomfortable admiration of a bygone age—both bent on grasping by the hand their new and best friend, Death.

# A HALF PLEIADE

LET St Beuve's avowal justify this title: "All these Academies, between you and me, are pieces of childishness, at any rate the French Academy is. Our least quarter of an hour of solitary reveries or of serious talk, yours and mine, in our youth, was better employed; but as one gets old one falls back into the power of these nothings; only it is well to know what nothings they are." So the significance of serious thought and discussion about art is apt to hold an inverse ratio to the number and age of those who think and discuss; for the future is always invisible. Robert Nichols, Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves, friends by their own avowal, have possibly had this importance in intimate conclave. Who can be sure that they have not deserved my title? They make no claim to be reformers or a movement, but such announcements are perhaps a fashionable foible, a trait which will disparage and date our period a hundred years hence. "The political virus even infected literature; writers and artists called themselves impressionists, symbolists, futurists, imagists and cubists; they published programmes and manifestoes, the charlatans!" as some unborn Taine may phrase it.

Rupert Brooke's verse had a conscious elegance that diverse judges attribute either to his treasuring a meagre vein or to a wary nature's perception that there had only yet been time to polish one of its many facets. In Robert Nichols' work variety and abundance are more evident than artistry and selectness. As if to make up for this he has prefaced his volume[1] with two quotations from *An Introduction to the Scientific Study of English Poetry*, by Mark Liddell. These passages, though neither new nor perfectly expressed, suggest that Nichols' attention has been absorbed by the rehearsal of passionate experience

[1] *Ardours and Endurances.* By Robert Nichols. Chatto & Windus.

or its reverberation through imagined scenes, rather than by niceties of style or prosody. All that he means by "a rhythm of ideas" is that the sense of the words should inspire the cadences of their sound; for, of course, in its major structures as well as in line and stanza, rhythm is a sensuous character only applicable to ideas by a metaphor. Poetry is, he thinks, "a marvel of the brain" fundamentally the same in all men; the poet only excels by more perfect organs of perception and expression—a conception in generous contrast to that of the young man, who is so keen on distinguishing his work as to whittle his gift away in the effort to remove all trace of kinship with other minds. On the other hand, only time will show whether Nichols will say a great deal in a manner not sufficiently distinct to live, or will fulfil the promise everywhere apparent in this book.

"On either hand the slender trees
Bow to the caressing breeze,
And shake their shocks of silver light
Against skies marbled greenish-white,
Save where, within a rent of blue,
The tilted slip of moon glints through,
Glittering upon us as we dance
With a soft extravagance
Of limbs as blonde as Autumn boughs
And gold locks floating from moony brows.
While anguished Pan the pipes doth blow
Fond and tremulous and low. . . ."

A good omen! We are reminded of the sweetest music of classical English. It is not easy to imitate; let those who think it is, echo so fine a strain so freshly. Nothing comes of nothing, but out of imitative admiration grow the grand wings of the Muses. However, this *Faun's Holiday* is a rambling, shapeless poem, though it constantly threatens to be better than it anywhere is. With the anxiety of one who expects to surpass himself Mr Nichols

appends "Oxford, Early Spring, 1914," to the poem, which is preceded by a note telling us that one part is adapted from a version of 1912 and another only composed as late as July, 1914. To set so seriously about helping your biographer is charmingly youthful. Another pre-war poem called *The Tower* describes Judas leaving the Last Supper:

> ". . . one arose to depart
> Having weakness and hate of weakness raging within his heart
> And bowed to the robed assembly whose eyes gleamed wet in the light"—

and at the bottom of the tower found beside the door—

> "Mary of Seven Evils, Mary Magdalen.
> And he was frighted at her. She sighed: 'I dreamed him dead.
> We sell the body for silver . . .'
> Then Judas cried out and fled."

Though the texture of the poem has been accepted too easily, these are touches of imaginative power which may lead to greater things. Possibly his best poem is—

THE RECKONING

THE whole world burns, and with it burns my flesh.
Arise, thou spirit spent by sterile tears;
Thine eyes were ardent once, thy looks were fresh,
Thy brow shone bright amid thy shining peers.
Fame calls thee not, thou who hast vainly strayed
So far from her; nor Passion, who in the past
Gave thee her ghost to wed and to be paid;
Nor love, whose anguish only learned to last.
Honour it is that calls; canst thou forget
Once thou wert strong? Listen, the solemn call
Sounds but this once again. Put by regret
For summons missed, or thou hast missed them all.
Body is ready, Fortune pleased; O let
Not the poor Past cost the proud Future's fall.

With that he turns to enlist. It is a little difficult to guess what "Fortune pleased" may refer to. Possibly that, in sounding him this new, terrible summons, Fortune shows herself pleased to give him a new chance of retrieving whatever in his life had gone awry. The rest is touching in its sincerity, all the more for its somewhat grandiloquent address.

Wistful, hesitant, eager, boyish, yet already regretful over things done ill—all the ingenuous flutter of an ambitious but not yet fully sinewed nature—with what image shall we associate the attitude of Robert Nichols in this book? Sculpture is too definite. But a fresco in the Prytaneum. Not a large panel nor in a central place. I see a boy battling in a strong wind with a shirt from which he cannot free his wrists. Splash! splash! his companions plunge into the sea, he totters with impatience, half laughs at his own misfortune, blushes at seeming to lag behind, yet thrills at the possibility of retrieving all and being first at the goal. But many of these poems are dreamy! and was not our lad in a muse when he forgot to unbutton those wrist-bands, before pulling his shirt over his head? Look, the sky is grey, the water rough, the wind deafening; only those who swim for honour will not defer the race.

With Siegfried Sassoon we have "glad confident morning"; he does easily and well what he desires to do. His rhythms never hark back to Milton's youth as Robert Nichols' did; they stop short at John Masefield and Thomas Hardy. The longest poem[1] is a monologue. The speaker, an old huntsman, has become inn-keeper, only to lose his savings instead of increasing them; he lazily maunders about life and religion, the point being the piquancy of vulgar notions of hell and heaven, when travestied in images drawn from his narrow round of experience with the pack and behind the bar. It might

[1] *The Old Huntsman and Other Poems.* Heinemann. 5s.

be claimed by those anxious to show that this young poet's roots strike deeper than I have suggested that this poem resembles Browning's *Caliban on Setebos*. The book at first seems merely smart, buoyed on good health and good fortune, "like little wanton boys who swim on bladders."

STAND TO: GOOD FRIDAY MORNING

I'D been on duty from two till four.
I went and stared at the dug-out door.
Down in the frowst I heard them snore.
"Stand to!" Somebody grunted and swore.
Dawn was misty; the skies were still;
Larks were singing, discordant and shrill;
They seemed happy; but I felt ill.
Deep in water I splashed my way
Up the trench to our bogged front line.
Rain had fallen the whole damned night,
O Jesus, send me a wound to-day,
And I'll believe in Your bread and wine,
And get my bloody old sins washed white.

Graves' tone is more felicitous in this vein, his cynicism is less consciously aggressive.

STRONG BEER

. . . . . .
Tell us, now, how and when
We may find the bravest men? . . .
Oh, never choose as Gideon chose
By the cold well, but rather those
Who look on beer when it is brown,
Smack their lips and gulp it down.
Leave the lads who tamely drink
With Gideon by the water brink,
But search the benches of the Plough,
The Tun, The Sun, The Spotted Cow,
For jolly rascals, lads who pray,
Pewter in hand, at close of day,
"Teach me to live that I may fear
The grave as little as my beer."

Nichols is hardly ever so successful as these two pieces are, yet even his war poems (records of casual scenes and moods), which cannot be said to push beyond appearances, are warmer and not so arid as Sassoon's, not so trivial as Graves'.

" ' 'Ello! wot's up? ' ' Let's 'ave a look! '
' Come on, Ginger, drop that book! '
' Wot an 'ell of bloody noise! '
' It's the Yorks and Lancs, me boys! '

So we crowd: hear, watch them come . . .
One man drubbing on a drum,
A crazy, high mouth-organ blowing,
Tin cans rattling, cat-calls, crowing . . .

' 'Ip 'urrah! ' ' Give Fritz the chuck.'
' Good ol' bloody Yorks! ' ' Good luck! '
' Cheer! '
I cannot cheer or speak
Lest my voice, my heart must break."

His comrades' intentions are thinner than this, indeed so fully rewarded with a grin that the title "poet" appears misplaced. Slangy cynicism characterises many of Sassoon's poems, but reading on, something deeper is discovered.

" When I'm among a blaze of lights,
With tawdry music and cigars
And women dawdling through delights,
And officers at cocktail bars, . . .
Sometimes I think of garden nights
And elm trees nodding at the stars.

I dream of a small fire-lit room
With yellow candles burning straight,
And glowing pictures in the gloom,
And kindly books that hold me late.
Of things like these I love to think
When I can never be alone:
Then someone says: ' Another drink? ' . . .
And turns my living heart to stone."

Nothing could be better than that "When I can never be alone." It is as apt as it is simple, worthy of any master.

So he yearns from the crowd, the mud, the din at the Front; and when he gets home on leave he walks up round the house where his friend used to live, and through the wood they often paced together, seeking for communion with him, though he is dead.

"Ah, but there was no need to call his name.
He was beside me now, as swift as light.
I knew him crushed to earth in scentless flowers,
And lifted in the rapture of dark pines.
'For now,' he said, 'my spirit has more eyes
Than heaven has stars; and they are lit by love.
My body is the magic of the world,
And dawn and sunset flame with my spilt blood.
My breath is the great wind and I am filled
With molten power and surge of the bright waves
That chant my doom along the ocean's edge. . . .'"

Thus sorrow opens the flood-gates of his eloquence. Yet though it less suggests abundance, Graves' simpler, briefer *Not Dead* is perhaps more effective.

"Walking through trees to cool my heat and pain
I know that David's with me here again.
All that is simple, happy, strong he is.
Caressingly I stroke
Rough bark of the friendly oak.
A brook goes babbling by: the voice is his.
Turf burns with pleasant smoke;
I laugh at chaffinch and at primroses;
All that is simple, happy, strong, he is.
Over the whole wood in a little while
Breaks his slow smile."

Here both young scoffers are in earnest. And though Graves succeeds best, one doubts whether he will task himself enough for greater things, whereas throughout Sassoon's book, with its glib impressionism playing with

worn themes in order to make something out of the wrong side of them, there is a touch of strength, a gift for succeeding to-day which will help him when he turns his mind to its true work. But on this theme also Nichols, in spite of his less steady hand, can match them both, perhaps surpass either.

OUR DEAD

THEY have gone from us. O no! they are
The inmost essence of each thing that is
Perfect for us; they flame in every star;
The trees are emerald with their presences.
They are not gone from us; they do not roam
The flow and turmoil of the lower deep,
But have now made the whole wide world their home,
And in its loveliness themselves they steep.
They fail not ever; theirs is the diurn
Splendour of sunny hill and forest grave;
In every rainbow's glittering drop they burn;
They dazzle in the massed clouds' architrave;
They chant on every wind, and they return
In the long roll of any deep blue wave.

The grief is that a voice like our own, a mind which had communed with ours, has been replaced by a world-wide absence: travel where we will, the well-known hail can never surprise us again. An end has been reached. Rupert Brooke's sonnet gives splendid expression to the strange awe of this silent, empty prospect. Yet all three of these younger poets, in a strain of slightly affected pantheism, console themselves that what they have lost is added to what remains—invisibly present in it; and you are set pondering whether inspiration leavened the literary convention, derived from Shelley's *Adonais*, sufficiently to give their having done this, force as a hint of some deep human trait. What place do we really think "our dead" should take in our lives? The poet who would convince us of the truth would need to be not

only daring and honest as these boys, but wise and profoundly gentle.

A shirt was clinging to Nichols' image, but Sassoon appears in full uniform, equal to every claim made by a day of action. Or is his smartness rather intellectual than practical? Derision hardly consists with might and main. Scorn abstracts itself and stands aside. The dapper mind is exasperated by fatigue and danger, and ever tries to reserve for self-realisation a few crumbs of time and energy. Shall we not picture this satirist better huddling under a greatcoat in some chilly dug-out? Refusing to drop asleep, he muses of his room in college, or holds a book he is too tired to read for a few seconds near his candle-end before putting it out. Preoccupied with to-day, he is of the best that it recognises in itself.

But no! How easy it is to be unjust! Another little book [1] arrives, clearer-voiced; in it the self-conscious grin opens to a bitter laugh, while on its later pages the soul rebels, repents and aspires, with grace and power.

BANISHMENT

I AM banished from the patient men who fight.
They smote my heart to pity, built my pride.
Shoulder to aching shoulder, side by side,
They trudged away from life's broad wealds of light.
Their wrongs were mine; and ever in my sight
They went arrayed in honour. But they died,—
Not one by one: and mutinous I cried
To those who sent them out into the night.

The darkness tells how vainly I have striven
To free them from the pit where they must dwell
In outcast gloom convulsed and jagged and riven
By grappling guns. Love drove me to rebel.
Love drives me back to grope with them through hell;
And in their tortured eyes I stand forgiven.

[1] *Counter-Attack and Other Poems.* Siegfried Sassoon. Heinemann. 2s. 6d.

For a young officer to refuse to lead more men to death may give proof of truer courage than to continue to do it without conviction. Such insubordination is abundantly excused both by the facts that prompted it and by the action that retrieved it.

Were all men capable of such mutinies war would cease. War is forced on many whose souls rebel against it by many who seek profit in it, whether for themselves, their caste or their nation. But these were surely more numerous and more dominant among our enemies than on our side: yet even Prussians are men. How many of us repel the offer of an unfair advantage? how many pounce on it? This solidarity of the average man with them gives war-lords their power, which must be broken symbolically in fact before the human spirit will discipline its appetite for exploiting weaker men. Grenfells are needed to subjugate this dragon; but they will recognise brother spirits among the conscientious objectors, who brave not only the enemy but the whole world. Just as Sassoon's scorn for many common attitudes towards the war is too intellectual to inspire his best poetry, so censors of all mankind discover a theoretical nudity. Our dependence on our neighbours, even when we are forced to despise their judgment, is more certain than our own wisdom can be. Peace with its commerce was blighted with a like shame, waste and ruthlessness, yet who dissociated himself thus completely from its prosperity? Then to refuse to soil the hands when millions must be stained will appear ungenerous, unless the danger run in keeping them so daintily clean exceed the common danger; and even then the grace of a divine humility may not be superfluous. History has proved, however, that the Prince of Peace necessarily appears hostile to the average man until he rises from death, no longer to reason about property and liberty in the world but to appeal for service and integrity in the heart.

*Timon of Athens* is frequently enacted in small on the nursery boards, often with a sixth act, an act as touching and more heroic than the prodigal son's last, when the scorned scorner returns to his world. In the splendour of early manhood such a repentant Timon is a rarer and grander figure—stooping his proud, honest head because though men are servile and treacherous, he who is neither is yet their brother in so many other ways that when Athens is besieged he claims to share their agony as a privilege. Such is the figure gazing on which my admiring eyes are misted, after reading this sonnet *Banishment.*

Less passion, and an easier commerce with actuality would seem to characterise the poetry of Captain Robert Graves. His is a taking smile.

"The child alone a poet is:
Spring and Fairyland are his.
Truth and Reason show but dim,
And all's poetry with him.
Rhyme and music flow in plenty
For the lad of one and twenty,
But Spring for him is no more now
Than daisies to a munching cow;
Just a cheery pleasant season,
Daisy buds to live at ease on.
He's forgotten how he smiled
And shrieked at snowdrops when a child."

As reason wakes, lads find themselves asked to accept not only the dumbfounding universe but monstrous social and political accumulations; and, for the most part, religious ideals tangled with fabulous legend. For all this there is no simple and clear defence; even genius is at a loss to create so much as an appearance of straightforwardness or to deduce a practical course which you can pretend is, or has been, followed. This world's sublimest tact is the inept stare that refuses to see difficulties. Youngsters laugh, however seriously minded, for laughter

is their one escape from the awe-inspiring immensity of the imposition. The more comprehensive the mind the more kinds of relief it seeks in laughter. The young man who guys love, art, science, justice and the Bible is usually he who is most naturally gifted for pursuing ideals of affection, beauty, truth, righteousness and reverence. The middle-aged forget what they laughed at in youth: for my own part I cannot recall that there was any limit either of decency or reverence; Rabelais had not gone too far. Aristophanes proves that Athenian taste forbade no jest. And while the laugh rings in his ear no young fellow of parts is inclined to deny it a universal privilege. I have even seen one joke about toothache while writhing with it. We first discover subjects that are no laughing matter under the lash of predicted consequences, as we accept servitude to social and political ends; then we begin in revenge to outlaw indecency and irreverence. The young and gifted are right, æsthetic training and intellectual power must achieve an Attic freedom. We need not wonder then to find a young captain-poet writing in a jocular vein about his own wounds and death, and every subject that touches him with at all similar force. The quality of his laughter is all that concerns us; and this, let me hasten to assure the long faces, is irreverent rather than indecent, fantastic rather than boisterous. Now faces are long because they have not laughed enough, not because they have been wise.

The æsthetic expression of a comic sense is perhaps the most difficult problem taste has to face. The success of a jest, as Shakespeare said, "lies in the ear." Men become less ticklish and laugh less as life proceeds. A child so enjoys laughing it hardly needs a jest to set it off, and right on up to extreme old age no tears are more grateful than those squeezed out when both aching sides have to be held. But this physical enjoyment bribes the taste to be indulgent; that we have laughed rebukes all censure of a

jest, just as not to have laughed puts our judgment out of court. But taste, like the soldier, must face all odds and strive to remain honest and delicate, in spite of the natural man.

Captain Robert Graves' humour attains a kind and degree of success similar to that of Robert Nichols' effort after beauty—glimpses and promises of felicity but not much more; and he also finds a rival in Siegfried Sassoon, who sounds a like note of fantastic levity in his *Noah* and *Policeman*. This third star in the tiny constellation has on the whole the most definite character, a ray whose spectrum is more nearly unique. Many of his poems deal with the childhood he has so recently quit, in its home rather than its school side; he seems to remain constantly aware of his knickerbocker self and of the family he made one of. Nonsense and laughter are still the happy relief from a probably more mature daily habit, which his rank might seem to infer—relief even after the most terrible experiences of trench life.

"Through long nursery nights he stood
By my bed unwearying,
Loomed gigantic, formless, queer,
Purring in my haunted ear
That same hideous nightmare thing,
Talking as he lapped my blood,
In a voice cruel and flat,
Saying for ever: 'Cat! . . . Cat! . . . Cat! . . .'

. . . . . .

Morphia-drowsed, again I lay
In a crater by High Wood:
He was there with straddling legs,
Staring eyes as big as eggs,
Purring as he lapped my blood,
His black bulk darkening the day—
With a voice cruel and flat,
'Cat!... Cat!... Cat!' he said. 'Cat!... Cat!...'"

## ESCAPE

"August 6, 1916. Officer previously reported died of wounds, now reported wounded:—Graves, Captain R., Royal Welsh Fusiliers."

BUT I *was* dead, an hour or more.
I woke when I'd already passed the door
That Cerberus guards, and half-way down the road
To Lethe, as an old Greek signpost showed . . .
Dear Lady Proserpine . . .
Cleared my poor buzzing head and sent me back . . .
Breathless, with leaping heart along the track.
After me roared and clattered angry hosts
Of demons, heroes, and policemen-ghosts . . .
There's still some morphia that I bought on leave.
Then swiftly Cerberus' wide mouth I cram
With army biscuit smeared with ration jam; . . .
A crash; the beast blocks up the corridor
With monstrous hairy carcase, red and dun—
Too late! for I've sped through.
O Life! O sun!

This vivid resilience occurs not only after the most cruel physical agony, but during the long wearing-down of winter in the trenches—as difficult to bear as protracted toothache.

## TO ROBERT NICHOLS

From Frise on the Somme in February, 1917, in answer to a letter saying: "I am just finishing my *Faun's Holiday*. I wish you were here to feed him with cherries."

HERE by a snow-bound river
In scrapen holes we shiver,
And like old bitterns we
Boom to you plaintively:
Robert, how can I rhyme
Verses for your desire—
Sleek fauns and cherry-time,
Vague music and green trees,
Hot sun and gentle breeze,

England in June attire
And life born young again
For your gay goatish brute . . .
Lips dark with juicy stain,
Ears hung with bobbing fruit?
Why should I keep him time?
Why in this cold and rime,
Where even to dream is pain?
No, Robert, there's no reason;
Cherries are out of season,
Ice grips at branch and root,
And singing birds are mute.

His range is from Strong Beer to Christ, but is rather of theme than of mood, another hint of a more set character. Here is some half-mystical nonsense on the temptation in the wilderness:

"He held communion
With the she-pelican
Of lonely piety.
Basilisk, cockatrice,
Flocked to his homilies,
With mail of dread device, . . .
With eager dragon eyes;
And ever with him went . . .
Comrade, with ragged coat,
Gaunt ribs—poor innocent— . . .
The guileless old scapegoat;
For forty nights and days
Followed in Jesus' ways,
Sure guard behind Him kept,
Tears like a lover wept."

He confesses that even at trystings with a lady a third is always present.

THE SPOIL-SPORT

My familiar ghost again
Comes to see what he can see,
Critic, son of Conscious Brain,
Spying on our privacy.

The passages already quoted prove that, as a poet, he is disinclined to think effort worth while, and easily consents to imperfections characteristic of that phase of skill which distinguishes play from a profession. *Colin Clout* is more gentlemanly than *Paradise Lost*, even though it be less worthy of man.

"What could be dafter
Than John Skelton's laughter?
What sound more tenderly
Than his pretty poetry?
So where to rank old Skelton?
He was no monstrous Milton
Nor wrote no *Paradise Lost*,
So wondered at by most,
Praised so disdainfully,
Composed so painfully.
He struck what Milton missed,
Milling an English grist
With homely turn and twist.
He was English through and through,
Not Greek, nor French, nor Jew,
Though well their tongues he knew. . . ."

Yet, as good old Skelton pled:

"For though my rhime be ragged,
Tattered and jagged,
Rudely rain-beaten,
Rusty and moth-eaten,
If ye take well therewith,
It hath in it some pith."

A just claim; besides there is something ideal about absence of strain; greatness has in Milton undoubtedly taken itself a shade too seriously. However, in the end one perhaps likes our humorist best when he is gravest.

1915

I'VE watched the Season passing slow, so slow,
In fields between La Bassée and Bethune;
Primroses and the first warm day of Spring,
Red poppy floods of June,

August, and yellowing Autumn, so
To Winter nights knee-deep in mud or snow,
And you've been everything.

Dear, you've been everything that I most lack
In these soul-deadening trenches—pictures, books,
Music, the quiet of an English wood,
Beautiful comrade-looks,
The narrow, bouldered mountain-track,
The broad, full-bosomed ocean, green and black,
And Peace, and all that's good.

Yes, he is the man who does not forget, whom to-day does not absorb; he remains conscious of a crowd of younger selves, and of those distant places which have coloured his thought. At the front the absent are "everything," and after death "everything" becomes the lost friend. A complex and delicately poised nature, but perhaps lacking the passion and impetus that can shape large and difficult themes. Watts might have painted a young man leading a child through Gehenna and preventing its terror by keeping it laughing, but such allegories are not necessary or obvious enough for successful plastic treatment even by a great painter. Christophe's statue, *Le Masque*, is better conceived; a smiling artificial visage still fronts the world from which the real agonised head has fallen back. From one view—

"vois ce souris fin et voluptueux
Où la fatuité promène son extase";

while from the other—

"voici, crispée atrocement
La véritable tête, et la sincère face
Renversée à l'abri de la face qui ment,"

as Baudelaire describes the well-known masterpiece in the Jardin des Tuileries. Only I think to substitute a man for the woman would heighten the effect, and for this the

imagination can relieve our young captain of his accoutrements and exchange his gas mask for one which laughs. Yes, nimble youth plays with life and death, and interchanges agony with ecstasy, even as laughter sheds tears for very pleasure.

Those who shall gaze back a century hence may discern rather in Nichols than in Sassoon or Graves the poet's mind that is independent of time and approaches all human circumstance with the kinsman's joy or pain. It will depend on what they are yet to write, which of these three those distant readers are best able to strip and set free in the Palæstra of immortal youth with Grenfell and Brooke—companions meet for those who read with Plato or those who, a-horseback, passed Pheidias on the road, and who, also, most of them, matured and became different when Death had picked his favourites out.

# R. E. VERNÈDE

SELF-PRAISE is no recommendation, neither is a profession of patriotism; besides, the Germans have raised such a pother over theirs that silence would seem enjoined on all self-respecting men, for fear of even distantly resembling those blatant deluded souls. "The last resource of a scoundrel," Doctor Johnson called these professions of devotion to one's country; and Gilbert laughed them down with his—

"In spite of all temptations
To belong to other nations. . . ."

We are what we are in this respect, neither by choice nor yet by merit, but by necessity. Most of us could not betray our country even if we were born treacherous, the situation would be too strong for us; and it is only some unusual situation which can make praise for patriotic action due to a good man, or turn a weak man into a traitor. No doubt we were all pro-German to the extent of our failings; for nothing cumbers or hinders a country more than the shortcomings common to the majority of its people. Yet how easily intelligent men are lured away to indulge in this odious rhetoric! How sane the common soldier is in this; "Blighty"[1] is his name for the mother isle. No name could be more exactly deserved; for a country is always, by collective action, blighting the best hopes and virtues of its sons; and yet they feel for it the affection expressed in a pet name as for some impossibe old landlady who has contributed to all the happiness they have known.

[1] "Blighty" is derived from the Arabic and hence Urdu (*camp language*) of the Mogul soldiery, Viláyat meaning a country, which has come in India to designate England or Europe, and the adjective Viláyati, English. But the British soldier in adopting the word for home or England accepted also half humorously the sense associated with its deformed pronunciation.

R. E. Vernède was a peace lover quite unfamiliar with weapons, over forty and married, yet he enlisted in 1914. He was a man of remarkable intellectual and moral delicacy, and yet his muse returns to this theme of patriotism, as a moth haunts a candle. He had deserved esteem for several works in prose, and his friends made sure that in time a more general and generous acknowledgment would accrue to him. He was of French descent, and these poems [1] show a fine sense for literary craftsmanship. The war made a poet of him, for the verses written prior to it are comparatively unambitious. Perhaps the lyrical impulse aroused was younger than the rest of his mind, or was it some French traditional reliance on trumpet-calls that set him toot-tooting?

"Oh War-lord of the Western Huns—that Army of Sir John's
Your legions know it, do they not? They drove it back from Mons—
'Twas small enough . . . too small perhaps . . . the British line is thin . . .
It won't seem quite so little when it's marching through Berlin."

Surely Vernède cannot have voiced this boast for his own satisfaction. Do we listen to one for whom "anything pretentious and pompous was a target" when we read—

"The sea is God's—and England,
England shall keep it free"?

Surely such things are intended to reach duller ears than his own. Imagine this ardent dreamer, suddenly surrounded with "Tommies," gaining rapid ascendancy over them by his moral elevation, but at the same time

[1] *War Poems and Other Verses.* By R. E. Vernède. Heinemann. 3s. 6d. Quotations by permission of Mrs C. H. Vernède.

aching to express their inarticulate enthusiasms for them. An excellent motive, but the Muses have decreed that words and images must fascinate us before we can enthral others with them. We are told that "he insists on keeping sharp the blade of indignation"; but the Germans did that for us far better. Indignation has a grand force, but one which must owe nothing to self-culture; to nurse it is to corrupt it—is indeed one of the knavish tricks of Prussian policy.

I cannot help feeling that the Kaiser has done for the word "God" very much what "über alles" has done for professions of patriotism. Yet Vernède raps it out with all the assurance of a bishop. To-day it either means too much or too little for frequent use, save when addressing those who, like children, belong to an earlier world. The idea of Providence has become too simple, too many relations are implied to be so grouped, just as the idea of England has become too complex for Britannia's outfit. The country that triumphed over Napoleon was worse than an enemy to masses of her people under Castlereagh, and this and other contradictions subsist, though they are not quite so glaring.

Vernède had been used to complain playfully that life was humdrum—that is, he was one of those many gifted men of whom England, to her shame, made no good use, damping their energies with the huge sponge of her lethargic materialism. His old schoolfellow, Mr G. K. Chesterton, has told us: "No man could look more lazy and no man was more active. He would move as swiftly as a leopard from something like sleep to something too unexpected to be called gymnastics. It was so that he passed from the English country life he loved so much, with its gardening and dreaming, to an ambush and a German gun."

He published two or three not quite successful novels, visited India and Canada, and wrote pleasantly of what

he had seen. He played tennis, gardened and occasionally walked many miles very fast. But none of these things could absorb him. He was grateful for them, but not content with them. In thanking your country for such a life, a slight extravagance of compliment is gracious, but he would probably never have used it if she had not suddenly accepted from him the total dedication of himself; he would have felt restrained by the fact that though she kept him and his peers in clover, she was keeping far greater numbers in want.

## A PETITION

All that a man might ask thou has given me, England,
    Birth-right and happy childhood's long heartsease,
And love whose range is deep beyond all sounding,
    And wider than all seas.

A heart to front the world and find God in it,
    Eyes blind enow, but not too blind to see
The lovely things behind the dross and darkness,
    And lovelier things to be.

And friends whose loyalty time nor death shall weaken,
    And quenchless hope and laughter's golden store;
All that a man might ask thou has given me, England,
    Yet grant thou one thing more:

That now when envious foes would spoil thy splendour,
    Unversed in arms, a dreamer such as I
May in thy ranks be deemed not all unworthy,
    England, for thee to die.

This chance to use himself thoroughly and to adventure greatly filled him with enthusiasm and hope. Emotion is simple-minded, and for a moment his world seemed all of one piece; as broad meadows may be run together by

a flood, everything was merged in a shining mirror of the uplifted sky. Still it is reassuring to notice by the dates of his poems that his landmarks were reappearing and that Germany and England are no longer just black and white. By December, 1916, he strikes truer, less complacent notes:

"We have failed—we have been more weak than these betrayers—
In strength or in faith we have failed; our pride was vain.
How can we rest who have not slain the slayers?
What peace for us, who have seen Thy children slain?

Hark, the roar grows . . . the thunders reawaken—
We ask one thing, Lord, only one thing now:
Hearts high as theirs, who went to death unshaken,
Courage like theirs to make and keep their vow.

To stay not till these hosts whom mercies harden,
Who know no glory save of sword and fire,
Find in our fire the splendour of Thy pardon,
Meet from our steel the mercy they desire. . . .

Then to our children there shall be no handing
Of fates so vain—of passions so abhorr'd . . .
But Peace . . . the Peace which passeth understanding . . .
Not in our time . . . but in their time, O Lord."

And later still we have:

## A LISTENING POST

THE sun's a red ball in the oak
And all the grass is grey with dew.
Awhile ago a blackbird spoke—
He didn't know the world's askew.

And yonder rifleman and I
  Wait here behind the misty trees,
To shoot the first man that goes by,
  Our rifles ready on our knees.

How could he know that if we fail
  The world may lie in chains for years
And England be a bygone Tale
  And right be wrong, and laughter tears?

Strange that this bird sits there and sings
  While we must only sit and plan—
Who are so much the higher things—
  The murder of our fellow-man. . . .

But maybe God will cause to be—
  Who brought forth sweetness from the strong—
Out of our discords harmony
  Sweeter than that bird's song.

Though the rousing of Vernède's lyrical impulse was at first coincident with loss of discrimination, and might be condemned as an attempt to shout with the crowd, I find its excuse, if not its justification, in that ardent sympathy that at first wraps the confused soul in cloud, but will, like a late September morning by 10 A.M., grow glorious as a summer day. Readers only feel the insult of not being treated as an author's equals, in proportion as they are his peers. Now Vernède's peers can look after themselves, but the men he looked after in that hell at the front needed him, and needed such as he was, more than any other kind of officer. He was not artist enough to reconcile both these claims, but he chose the most important. All that he says of his friend we can safely transfer to himself; the testimony of his brother officers is our warrant.

## R. E. VERNÈDE

To F. G. S.

("Seriously wounded")

PEAKS that you dreamed of, hills your heart has climbed on,
  Never your feet shall climb, your eyes shall see;
All your life long you must tread lowly places,
  Limping for England; well—so let it be.

We know your heart's too high for any grudging.
  More than she asked, you gladly gave to her:
What tho' its streets you'll tramp instead of snow-fields,
  You'll be the cheeriest, as you always were.

Yes, and you'll shoulder all our packs—we know you—
  And none will guess you're wearied night or day—
Yes, you'll lift lots of lame dogs over fences,
  Who might have lifted you, for that's your way.

All your life long—no matter—so you've chosen.
  Pity you? Never—that were waste indeed—
Who up hills higher than the Alps you loved so
  All your life long will point the way and lead.

Such men are mature in a sense that most of us are not. The joy of recognising their characters, the joy felt in these verses, is in quality like that we might receive from a fine picture in which a strong man and a number of lads were shown hauling a boat up the beach—their muscular developments contrasted, their attitudes rhythmically applied to a common task. So, like a charm, the presense of these grown-up souls organises and increases our strength. Even Vernède's trumpet-calls give me glimpses of a man whole-heartedly playing with children in time he was free to give to some congenial hobby. What though his boyishness be a little out of fashion as compared with theirs! He succeeds and keeps them even-tempered,

brave and loyal. Several of these poems witness that he saw his "Tommies" as they were. What if the battle songs he wrote are not such as can ever quite win their favour, and can hardly better content a more refined public? since for those, as for these, his life and death were his best poem. He had been ready to appreciate all his men's virtues and to make even all their deficiencies. They were his inspiration and he was theirs. This give and take between the leader and the led is more trustworthy than the rigidity of discipline, replacing it by life—a wonder of creation comparable to a master work in art. Augmented living ought perhaps always to precede a literary production which should be the spirit's pæan for victory—for wider and more delicate relations achieved—though at times it has been the bitter song of the vanquished, declaring that his loss is greater and other than the victor's gain. That grander pulse was throbbing through Vernède's veins, as his more frequent bursts of song and ever truer note testify; the poet liberated in him was rehearsing the adequate lay which we shall never hear—and indeed the enemy did not gain by his death anything commensurate with what we have lost, even though such losses should kindle us more finely than that masterpiece unheard, unsung and for ever overdue could have done! In two stanzas to his wife which now dedicate the book, Vernède himself underlines the difference between promises and deeds, between words and the seal of death:

"What shall I bring to you, wife of mine,
  When I come back from the war?
A ribbon your dear brown hair to twine?
  A shawl from a Berlin store?
Say, shall I choose you some Prussian hack
  When the Uhlans we o'erwhelm?
Shall I bring you a Potsdam goblet back
  And the crest from a prince's helm?

Little you'd care what I laid at your feet,
  Ribbon or crest or shawl—
What if I bring you nothing, sweet,
  Nor maybe come home at all?
Ah, but you'll know, Brave Heart, you'll know
  Two things I'll have kept to send:
Mine honour for which you bade me go
  And my love—my love to the end."

# SORLEY

WHEN we first admire a person after death we are apt to feel a kind of joy that he is now unalterable, not to be pottered over or finicked with or painted out for some supposed improvement. In spite of reason we cannot really regret Keats' maturity, much less his old age. As we have been prevented by the centuries from sitting on the jury which banished Pheidias, we dote on his maimed and footless Theseus, and doubt whether the marble has not been improved by rough-handed Time; while we neglect or patronise the young sculptor in whom a like creative force struggles against the odds, with our long-established apathy. Only if we have followed its growth with all our hopes, a life seems broken through, snapped off and its promise wasted by early death. Then we wonder whether it is civilisation or barbarism that defends itself at such a cost. And the failure to preserve at least those who were creatively gifted from exposure, seems proof that our foresight was at fault, or our scale of values inadequate.[1] Sorley, the youngest, and it may be the most hope-inspiring of our poet soldiers, has set me musing thus. He is so fine, Death seems to have saved him from misshaping Life.

His language is poor and thin, but it moves powerfully, and constantly suggests organic forms. This is most unlooked for in a tyro. Sensuous images are extraordinarily persisted in, and as strangely few. Rain, wind, running, one particular spot on the downs where four grass tracks separate east, west, south and north, from a tall, weathered sign-post, and the "red-capped town" of Marlborough, where he was at school—these images return and return, ever freshly applied; but there is no

[1] *Marlborough and Other Verses*, etc. C. H. Sorley. Cambridge University Press. Quotations by permission of Professor W. R. Sorley.

hint of the neighbouring Savernake forest, it had too much the character of hostility to free movement. This young mind runs tirelessly, with ever revived pleasure, through an open wet bleak grey land, as once the boy clad only in jersey and shorts raced over the dim downs cloaked in rain.

### THE SONG OF THE UNGIRT RUNNERS

We swing ungirded hips,
And lightened are our eyes,
The rain is on our lips,
We do not run for prize,
We know not whom we trust
Nor whitherward we fare,
But we run because we must
Through the great wide air.

The waters of the seas
Are troubled as by storm.
The tempest strips the trees
And does not leave them warm.
Does the tearing tempest pause?
Do the tree-tops ask it why?
So we run without a cause
'Neath the big bare sky.

The rain is on our lips,
We do not run for prize.
But the storm the water whips
And the wave howls to the skies.
The winds arise and strike it
And scatter it like sand,
And we run because we like it
Through the broad bright land.

The felicity here is of the rarest and finest kind, and shapes the main form and rhythm; their inevitability sweeps us away and convinces, in spite of no matter what predisposition to stickle over details.

The downs have another hold on this poet; not only are they good to course at a long swinging run, they have preserved huge stones, earthworks and chiselled flints that tell of prehistoric lives.

STONES

THIS field is almost white with stones
That cumber all its thirsty crust.
And underneath, I know, are bones
And all around is death and dust.

. . . . . .

O, in these bleached and buried bones
Was neither love nor faith nor thought.

But like the wind in this bleak place
Bitter and bleak and sharp they grew,
And bitterly they ran their race,
A brutal bad unkindly crew:

Souls like the dry earth, hearts like stone,
Brains like the barren bramble-tree,
Stern, sterile, senseless, mute, unknown—
But bold, O, bolder far than we!

Against this wet, bleak, strenuous background of his predilection the young man's thought is astonishingly keen, fresh and mature.

"I," he says in the title poem, *Marlborough*,

"Have had my moments there, when I have been
Unwittingly aware of something more,
Some beautiful aspect, that I had seen
With mute unspeculative eyes before;

Have had my times, when, though the earth did wear
Her self-same trees and grasses, I could see
The revelation that is always there,
But somehow is not always clear to me."

Here he introduces as an image "Jacob's return from exile," and ends it:

"For God had wrestled with him, and was gone.
He looked around, and only God remained.
The dawn, the desert, he and God were one.
—And Esau came to meet him travel-stained.

So, there, when sunset made the downs look new
And earth gave up her colours to the sky,
And far away the little city grew
Half into sight, new-visioned was my eye.

I, who have lived, and trod her lovely earth,
Raced with her winds and listened to her birds,
Have cared but little for their worldly worth
Nor sought to put my passion into words.

But now it's different; and I have no rest
Because my hand must search, dissect and spell
The beauty that is better not expressed,
The thing that all can feel, but none can tell."

Words halt behind thought and feeling. After vision and inspiration have been aroused by experience, even the best poetry may seem lame. But Sorley was conscious of another reason why "Beauty is better not expressed." He knew that it would not be welcomed. He had reached that stage when the soul reacts against parents, masters and the world that has fostered it. He was a rebel, an unusually clear-eyed and affectionate rebel, who did not only feel that things were wrong, but could point them out with un unerring finger.

"O come and see, it's such a sight,
So many boys all doing right:
To see them underneath the yoke,
Blindfolded by the elder folk,
Move at a most impressive rate
Along the way that is called straight.
O, it is comforting to know
They're in the way they ought to go.

But don't you think it's far more gay
To see them slowly leave the way
And limp and lose themselves and fall?
O, that's the nicest thing of all.
I love to see this sight, for then
I know they are becoming men,
And they are tiring of the shrine
Where things are really not divine.

I do not know if it seems brave
The youthful spirit to enslave,
And hedge about lest it should grow.
I don't know if it's better so
In the long end. I only know
That when I have a son of mine,
He shan't be made to droop and pine,
Bound down and forced by rule and rod
To serve a God who is no God.
But I'll put custom on the shelf
And make him find his God himself.
Perhaps he'll find Him in a tree
Some hollow trunk, where you can see.
Perhaps the daisies in the sod
Will open out and show him God.
Or will he meet him in the roar
Of breakers as they beat the shore?
Or in the spiky stars that shine?
Or in the rain (where I found mine)?
Or in the city's giant moan?
—A God who will be all his own,
To whom he can address a prayer
And love him for he is so fair,
And see with eyes that are not dim
And build a temple meet for him."

Yes, the actual world is more hospitable and more inspiring than the scenery, the panorama that English conventions paint and hang round the young, in part to help and prepare them, but in part also to delude them and disguise our own fears and failures. Truth provides a roomier house than the average Englishman has hired

for his boys. Yet Sorley knew and felt that he had been unusually lucky in this respect. After leaving school he went to Germany for some months, and loved the life he saw in Mecklenberg Schwerin. He was reading the *Odyssey*, no longer one hundred lines at a time, but for his own pleasure, in long draughts, and was struck by the resemblance of the life he found about him, in that foreign place, to that he was reading about. He saw many things in Germany that were wrong, but it seemed to him that, as a nation, they had something to live for, while the English had struck him as lacking an adequate goal for effort. War was declared and he had to hurry across the frontier. In Cologne station he notes the various attitudes of the nationalities: Americans in a bustle for themselves; Germans in a bustle too, but for the Fatherland; "dark uprooted Italians peering from a squeaking truck—like Cassandra from the backmost car looking steadily down on Agamemnon." He was gazetted 2nd Lieutenant before August was out, and by December he writes:

LOST

Across my past imaginings
Has dropped a blindness silent and slow.
My eye is bent on other things
Than those it once did see and know.

I may not think on those dear lands
(O far away and long ago!)
Where the old battered signpost stands
And silently the four roads go

East, west, south and north,
And the cold winter winds do blow.
And what the evening will bring forth
Is not for me nor you to know.

Yet outwardly he was not at all "lost" in camp life, but held his own, was popular and successful, and did not know what ill health was. Promoted to a lieutenancy in November, 1914, he crossed to France in the following May, and was gazetted Captain in August, 1915, being killed near Hulloch on October the 13th that same year.

Once he wrote home wondering what kind of life he would take up after the war:

"Sorley is Gaelic for Wanderer. I have had a conventional education; Oxford would have corked it. But this (the war) has freed the spirit, glory be!"

Many, many must have felt freed from the tyranny of England by the mere fact of fighting for her against the tyranny of Germany. The tyranny of peace in half-baked countries like those we know, though less apparent than the tyranny of war, was perhaps more deadly to spiritual freedom; no Government yet established has deserved immunity from attack either from without or from within; that their constitutions should change smoothly and, if it may be, swiftly is the one possible hope for them all.

Much later Sorley writes:

"I am now beginning to think that free-thinkers should give their minds into subjection; for we, who have given our actions and volitions into subjection, gain such marvellous rest thereby. Only of course it is the subjecting of their powers of will and deed to a wrong master, on the part of a great nation, that has led Europe into war. Perhaps afterwards I and my likes will again become indiscriminate rebels. For the present, we find high relief in making ourselves soldiers."

No subjection can be wholesome and no master right for long. We must be freed in order to subject ourselves to better rules. No adequate rule has yet been conceived, even by the finest conscience. From prison to prison, or rather from enlargement to enlargement, men must advance or stagnate and die.

There was no black and white brutally juxtaposed in his vision of the European War; he was shocked to find so many, like Vernède, imbued with this childishly simple sense of utter contrast between the Allies and the Germans, and he seeks refuge with one correspondent, to whom he can safely put in a plea for a more rational view of the enemy.

"So it seems to me that Germany's only fault—is a lack of real insight and sympathy with those who differ from her. We are not fighting a bully, but a bigot. They are a young nation, and don't see that what they consider is being done for the good of the world may be really being done for self-gratification—like X, who, under pretence of informing the form, dropped into the habit of parading his own knowledge. X incidentally did the form a service by creating great amusement for it; and so is Germany incidentally doing the world a service (though not in the way it meant) by giving them something to live and die for, which no country but Germany had before. If the bigot conquers, he will learn in time his mistaken methods (for it is only of the methods and not of the goal of Germany that one can disapprove)—just as the early Christian bigots conquered by bigotry and grew larger in sympathy and tolerance, after conquest I regard the war as one between sisters, between Martha and Mary, the efficient and intolerant against the casual and sympathetic. Each side has a virtue for which it is fighting, and each that virtue's supplementary vice. I hope that whatever the material result of the conflict, it will purge these two virtues of their vices, and efficiency and tolerance will no longer be incompatible. But I think that tolerance is the larger virtue of the two, and efficiency must be her servant. So I am quite glad to fight against this rebellious servant. In fact I look at it this way. Suppose my platoon were the world. Then my platoon sergeant would represent efficiency and I

would represent tolerance. And I always take the sternest measures to keep my platoon sergeant in check! I fully appreciate the wisdom of the War Office when they put inefficient officers to rule sergeants. . . . But I've seen the Fatherland (I like to call it the Fatherland, for in many families papa represents efficiency and mama tolerance—but don't think I'm W.S.P.U.) so horribly misrepresented that I've been burning to put in my case for them to a sympathetic ear."

And he strikes the same note, in some ways more profoundly, in verse:

TO GERMANY

You are blind like us. Your hurt no man designed,
And no man claimed the conquest of your land.
But gropers both, through fields of thought confined,
We stumble and we do not understand.
You only saw your future bigly planned,
And we the tapering paths of our own mind,
And in each other's dearest ways we stand,
And hiss and hate. And the blind fight the blind.
When it is peace, then we may view again
With new-won eyes each other's truer form
And wonder. Grown more loving-kind and warm
We'll grasp firm hands and laugh at the old pain,
When it is peace. But until peace, the storm
The darkness and the thunder and the rain.

This, like the other poems I have quoted, has a fine movement; and though at the outset the phrasing is not felicitous, it improves till it becomes worthy of the meaning in the last three lines. Then, too, what wise, kindly eyes this young fellow sees with; how many of us can be put to shame by such a gentle sanity! His discoveries about his own countrymen are no less persuasively illuminating.

"One has fairly good chances of observing the life of

the barrack-room, and what a contrast to the life of a house in a public school! The system is roughly the same; the house-master or platoon commander entrusts the discipline of his charge to prefects or corporals, as the case may be. They never open their mouths in the barrack-room without the introduction of the unprintable swear-words and epithets; they have absolutely no 'morality' (in the narrower, generally accepted sense); yet the Public School boy should live among them to learn a little Christianity; for they are so extraordinarily nice to one another. They live in and for the present: we in and for the future. So they are cheerful and charitable always: and we often niggardly and unkind and spiteful. In the gymnasium at Marlborough, how the few clumsy specimens are ragged and despised and jeered at by the rest of the squad; in the gymnasium here you should hear the sounding cheer given to a man who has tried for eight weeks to make a long jump of eight feet, and at last, by the advice and assistance of others, has succeeded. They seem instinctively to regard a man singly, at his own rate, by his own standards and possibilities, not in comparison with themselves or others; that is why they are so far ahead of us in their treatment and sizing up of others."

Because they need servants, and because fine houses and rapid locomotion imply labour, the well-to-do tend to regard other kinds of people as existing for their convenience. In this notion they resemble the enemy, who thought other nations were there that Germany might be "über alles."

Sorley was very sensitive to the falseness and unfairness of this seductive outlook, and perceived how detrimental it is to the finer powers of those who indulge in it. He felt that even poets were too content to think of others as mere readers and admirers, and addresses to them a protest on behalf of less articulate souls:

## TO POETS

We are the homeless, even as you,
Who hope and never can begin.
Our hearts are wounded through and through
Like yours, but our hearts bleed within.
We too make music, but our tones
'Scape not the barrier of our bones.

We have no comeliness like you.
We toil, unlovely, and we spin,
We start, return : we wind, undo :
We hope, we err, we strive, we sin,
We love : your love's not greater, but
The lips of our love's might stay shut.
We have the evil spirits too
That shake our soul with battle-din,
But we have an eviller spirit than you,
We have a dumb spirit within :
The exceeding bitter agony
But not the exceeding bitter cry.

Here are shapeliness and vigour once more and, though finish and colour are to seek, there is still a marked improvement as the end comes in view.

Like other soldier poets, Sorley is anxious to think well of Death, whom he addresses :

I.

Saints have adored the lofty soul of you.
Poets have whitened at your high renown.
We stand among the many millions who
Do hourly wait to pass your pathway down.
You, so familiar, once were strange : we tried
To live as of your presence unaware.
But now in every road, on every side,
We see your straight and steadfast signpost here.
I think it like that signpost in my land,
Hoary and tall, which pointed me to go

Upward, into the Hills, on the right hand,
Where the mists swim and the winds shriek and blow,
A homeless land and friendless, but a land
I did not know and that I wished to know.

II.

Such, such is Death: no triumph: no defeat:
Only an empty pail, a slate rubbed clean,
A merciful putting away of what has been.

And this we know: Death is not Life effete,
Life crushed, the broken pail. We who have seen
So marvellous things know well the end not yet.
Victor and vanquished are a-one in death:
Coward and brave: friend, foe. Ghosts do not say
"Come, what was your record when you drew your breath?"
But a big blot has hid each yesterday
So poor, so manifestly incomplete.
And your bright Promise withered long and sped,
Is touched, stirs, rises, opens and grows sweet
And blossoms and is you, when you are dead.

These sonnets cannot compare for beauty and adequacy with Brooke's best, but the thought in them is perhaps even less expected, if not so certainly true. For us at least his promise is Sorley, now that he is dead. Death tempts us, nay forces us to overrate his actual production, and Reason in vain points out that the strait limits of his sensuous joys in image and language suggest that his poetical vein might have soon run dry. Yet not before he had enriched us, like another Matthew Arnold, with some equivalent for *Empedocles*, *Sohrab and Rustum* and *The Scholar Gipsy*, we retort. The power which shapes a masterpiece includes that which matures the man of the world, and that which renders the critic accomplished. Youth binds these and the other tacts and aptitudes in a solid faggot, but after a time there is

possibly more gain than loss, should life cut the cord and use the sticks singly. Then, perhaps, engrossed by political reform, the poet's soul may be felt as an agent and no longer by its cohesion provoke the echo, beauty from stony world. Death has settled that, and for many minds, when Wordsworth's hare is watched, racing on the moors while that mist raised by her feet from the wet turf runs with her, a boy will soon appear accompanied with a sweeping veil of rain coursing the same uplands. And when the elder poet has listened to the old leech-gatherer standing in the pool, he will turn to welcome wisdom from young rain-brightened lips as Sorley draws to a halt at his side, to wonder over prehistoric men or speak generously of those of to-day and to morrow. His is but a continuation of Wordsworth's theme; for as the dignity of individuals depends on their resolute independence, so that dignity alone renders a social amalgam feasible. A nation is not fused by these sacrificing and exploiting those, but by all devoting and employing themselves, and no man has a chance of doing this till he is a free agent. Nations, too, can only build a civilised world by respecting each other's independence, and the downfall of Germany shows how little efficiency can atone for the wish to domineer. Efficiency is fine, but kindness is beautiful, and beauty is as strong as light, far stronger than any palpable thing; and in the long run it will prove to be the only rightful ruler. All other principles need to resort to force, but for beauty vision will win allegiance, so soon as the smoke of strife and commerce is out of men's eyes.

# FRANCIS LEDWIDGE

FRANCIS LEDWIDGE,[1] as a poet, is the complement of Sorley; each brings us what the other lacks. Ledwidge has no constructive power, and the impetus of his cadences rarely carries him satisfactorily through even a short poem, whereas Sorley's rode on unchecked by weak lines and poor phrasing. Our new poet's language is, on the other hand, often over-poetical, and his images sometimes fantastically dazzling—an excess of the quality which critics perceive most easily and welcome most widely! And a vivid coloured flash on its surface is an important element in great verse. Lord Dunsany, who introduces Ledwidge to the public, tells us that he was born a peasant in Meath and tried once to assist a Dublin grocer. But cities cannot cage these wild souls, home memories inveigle, the country lures,

"And wondrous impudently sweet,
Half of him passion, half conceit,
The blackbird calls adown the street
Like the piper of Hamelin."

And the lad of sixteen who had written this "walked home one night a distance of thirty miles."

Since the war he had become a corporal in the regiment in which Lord Dunsany was a captain, and had travelled to Greece and Egypt. This preface likens him to John Clare, our English pauper poet, of one hundred years ago, whose life among a nation of shopkeepers is the saddest idyll; and even to-day I fancy that Ledwidge might have been congratulated on his birth the other side of St George's Channel, among people more patient with and more appreciative of poets. John Clare's poems were a

[1] *Songs of the Fields*. By Francis Ledwidge. Herbert Jenkins. 1915. *Songs of Peace*. By Francis Ledwidge. Herbert Jenkins. 1917. Quotations by permission of Herbert Jenkins, Esq., and Lord Dunsany.

series of delights over detail, grouped more or less as in nature by locality and season, yet rarely, if ever, shaped into a poetic whole. Ledwidge's verse stores details too, but they are less varied and less realistic, though better transmuted by his moods, for he is moved even more by the image that caps the perception than by the thing perceived. As a poet, at least, he too lived in a dream not yet articulated by reason and purpose. And one is tempted, though one has no right, to suppose that his life also may have had something of the ineffectual simplicity of John Clare's. His rhymes are related to those of Mr Yeats and the minor Irish poets of to-day, as Clare's were to Keats', Wordsworth's and Cowper's, and I think this is all that can be really meant when he has been praised for style. Irish work may often seem to have more style than English, even when it is far weaker in the fundamental qualities of great literature. Dominant moods give it a singleness and independence of outlook which condones the absence of complexity in emotion and of balance in intellectual grasp.

## THE SISTER

I SAW the little quiet town,
And the whitewashed gables on the hill,
And laughing children coming down
The laneway to the mill.

Wind-blushes up their faces glowed,
And they were happy as could be,
The wobbling water never flowed
So merry and so free.

One little maid withdrew aside
To pick a pebble from the sands.
Her golden hair was long and wide,
And there were dimples on her hands.

And when I saw her large blue eyes,
What was the pain that went through me ?
Why did I think on Southern skies
And ships upon the sea ?

I think this is as near as Ledwidge ever comes to organic perfection, though two freaks of phrasing fleck its very real beauty and success.

" And Gwydion said to Math, when it was Spring :
' Come now and let us make a wife for Llew.'
And so they broke broad boughs yet moist with dew
And in a shadow made a perfect ring :
They took the violet and the meadow-sweet
To form her pretty face, and for her feet
They built a mound of daisies on a wing,
And for her voice they made a linnet sing
In the wide poppy blowing for her mouth.
And over all they chanted twenty hours.
And Llew came singing from the azure south
And bore away his wife of birds and flowers."

If the success of this is smoother, there is to my mind a suspicion of the happy moment of a professor of poetry in its well-worn theme and the refurbished stock images of the Celtic Muse. *The Death of Aillil*, the most successful of his attempts at narrative, fails for me in the same way. *Songs of the Fields*, his first volume, rewards the reader far better than *Songs of Peace*, in good part written since the war began. Yet his soldiering in Greece gives us this :

THE HOME-COMING OF THE SHEEP

THE sheep are coming home in Greece,
Hark the bells on every hill !
Flock by flock, and fleece by fleece,
Wandering wide a little piece
Thro' the evening red and still,
Stopping where the pathways cease,
Cropping with a hurried will.

Thro' the cotton bushes low
Merry boys with shouldered crooks
Close them in a single row,
Shout among them as they go
With one bell-ring o'er the brooks.
Such delight you never know
Reading it from gilded books. . . .

The fourth line is quite as inadequate as some of Sorley's most careless, but the poem is exquisite ; only in the book the picture and mood are weakened by an additional stanza.

His movements are more sustainedly happy in less original work, which is an indication that he had it in him to surpass what now remains his best.

" I often look when the moon is low
Thro' that other window on the wall,
At a land all beautiful under snow,
Blotted with shadows that come and go
When the winds rise up and fall.
And the form of a beautiful maid
In the white silence stands
And beckons me with her hands. . . ."

The trouble produced by a soldier's life in such a mind accounts for the comparative poverty of the second book, rather than any failure of impulse or resource. Neither book is so much a collection of poems as a store-house of lines, phrases and images, with here a cadence caught and lost, there a striking thought—choice things, but rarely mounted to advantage, rather, to use his own words, like

". . . an apron full of jewels
The dewy cobweb swings."

Here are others : and you might have as many again, were there space to quote them :

" The large moon rose up queenly as a flower
Charmed by some Indian pipes."

"And all we learn but shows we know the less."

"When the wind passing took your scattered hair
And flung it like a brown shower in my face."

"Within the oak a throb of pigeon wings."

"And the blue
Of hiding violets, watching for your face,
Listen for you in every dusky place."

"The moon had won
Her way above the woods, with her small star
Behind her like the cuckoo's little mother. . . ."

"The bees are holding levees in the flowers."

"Day hangs its light between two dusks, my heart,
Always beyond the dark there is the blue.
Some time we'll leave the dark, myself and you,
And revel in the light for evermore.
. . . . . .
But in the dark your beauty shall be strong.
. . . . . .
Pigeons are home. Day droops—the fields are cold.
Now a slow wind comes labouring up the sky
With a small cloud long steeped in sunset gold,
Like Jason with the precious fleece anigh
The harbour of Iolcos. Day's bright eye
Is filmed with the twilight, and the rill
Shines like a scimitar upon the hill."

These things are strung together with little apparent connection except the rhymes, each poem's structure being the pattern that these make. However, you could glean felicities in such quantities from no other of these Soldier Poets, not even from Brooke; and note that this underlines Brooke's superiority; his reflective and organic power makes more of fewer treasures. The best

effect of reading Ledwidge is that which he describes in a poem dedicated to M. McG. ("Who came one day when we were all gloomy and cheered us with sad music").

. . . . . .

"Old memories knocking at each heart
Troubled us with the world's great lie:
You sat a little way apart
And made a fiddle cry.

. . . . . .

And rivers full of little lights
Came down the fields of waving green:
Our immemorial delights
Stole in on us unseen."

. . . . . .

The delight with which a child first perceives beauty, though it be forgotten, must never be barred and shuttered from return into the mind by coarsening habit or humbling care. If this happens, the enchantment of poetry is powerless. And as Antæus' strength was increased whenever his feet touched the earth, æsthetic power revives when these primordial joys return into the lofty buildings of a master mind; and should these smiling visitors desert it finally, however noble the building, its charm grows cold; so important is this love of particular things and particular aspect of things to the mind. This tenderness over detail means more to poetry and painting than the theorist easily allows. Though perceived as a flash on the surface, this is a pulse of health that, having made youth perfect, can recreate maturity and old age. Everything that exists is holy, or at least demonic, when seen as a new and solitary portent; thus it appears first to the child, and must reappear to inspire the artist.

In these small books, those whom the war has hurried too much and too long, and those whom it has deafened and sickened with evil sounds and evil sights, may find a well of refreshment suitable to a convalescent mood that has not the energy to appreciate more elegant, noble or

massive creations. Had he lived Ledwidge might very well have shown more constructive power than I seem to allow. He was still quite young when he was killed in Flanders; and those finer things that his genius would have created when it was fully organised were lost for ever. The choice and subtle images which crown his perceptions so frequently are in themselves structures, just as the cells of the body are living organisms. As we have seen, Sorley stands quite alone in power to shape an inevitable whole at so early an age. The vision that rises for me as I read these *Songs of the Fields* is more like John Clare than it would be were my mind more capable of detecting the intimate difference of tissue in the liveliest productions of the two men. Still, though in him it were but a phase to outgrow, this temperament embodies before my eyes, as an inveterate way of life in which most poets have some share. Though the body it informs grow old, this does not age: young-eyed, it has wandered every land where an oral literature was cherished, a welcome figure with the pathetic refinement of one who has mused much and yet lives destitute of creature comforts. His clothes have been new in regions far apart, though wear and weather have made them merely his, well-nigh obliterating fashions and colour. Watch, he stops on the hill road before a little fountain's trough which some herd-boy has banked round with turfs and stones, that a few sheep or a cow may drink the better! He discerns in it more success than his own activity has compassed—an image of hopes he once owned. He kneels and, gazing into the limpid basin, sees not, like Narcissus, his own features, but most dear memories, moonrises and sunsets, wind-bent boughs, the calls of many birds, nodding flowers, children running, laughing and kissing—he sees and hears as he first saw and heard. From many poems the delight of other men's visions changes and interchanges with these until he clears a mist from his eyes, for

always before long he expects "a face full of smiles," a young woman's, always the same, though now the eyes are blue, now grey, now brown, though the hair curls or is smooth, though name after name seems to fit it, though blue jewels made from feathers crown it or coral from the sea, helmeted now in fur and now in mail, or white-capped like "a fairy hooded in one bell of the valley-lily," or, uncovered, with tresses that play with the wind. The eyes are always innocent, always welcoming, but so various that, despite a constant homeliness, it is a goddess's face—her laugh is heard wherever this or that in the world has pleased eye or ear of this wanderer, whose heart has remained young and fresh as that of a boy. And he, he forgets his life, forgets the stones and glinting mica silt that floor that limpid trough, forgets the grass of Parnassus that he has set floating on it, and is where she is, while contentment fills him and that lonely place.

# EDWARD THOMAS

EDWARD THOMAS had wandered over literature and England, and shaped a mind that, at first opinionated, had saddened and mellowed. In the end he became a poet and a soldier almost at the same time, and now is dead. His success in prose had always been middling, breeding further discontent; do his poems[1] greatly succeed? Every time I read them I like them better. *Lob*, his longest effort, was the first I saw; it was perfectly dissociated from him by the assumed name of "Eastaway" and appeared to me full of promise though unwieldy; but in this collected volume his quality does not strike me as like a young man's, but wily, artful and aware of many traps.

"Rise up, rise up,
And, as the trumpet blowing
Chases the dreams of men,
As the dawn glowing
The stars that left unlit
The land and water,
Rise up and scatter
The dew that covers
The print of last night's lovers—
Scatter it, scatter it!

While you are listening
To the clear horn,
Forget, men, everything
On this earth newborn,
Except that it is lovelier
Than any mysteries.
Open your eyes to the air
That has washed the eyes of the stars
Through all the dewy night:
Up with the light,
To the old wars;
Arise, arise!"

[1] *Poems by Edward Thomas*. Selwyn & Blount. 3s. 6d. Quotations by permission of Mrs Edward Thomas.

Though the impulse to write that was strong, it has constantly obeyed the bridle of keen literary taste, its grace is not like that of wild life, but like that of horsemanship, and will be the more admired the more fully the difficulties overcome are appreciated. In some of these poems novelty is sought as though felicity were despaired of, yet a few are really happy. Keats believed that felicities should so chime in with the human soul as to seem known before, even though a prenatal existence had to be supposed to justify that impression. Novelties in poetry fail if merely new. Mr Yeats has of late years set the fashion of skating across ever thinner ice until it seems almost miraculous that verse is not prose. You watch the skater as the surface warps under his swift passage, and expect that in another minute he will be in it, floundering like any Walt Whitman, but this does not happen. Rhyme is not discarded, but strained; rhythms are not free, but licentious. Thomas shows this tendency in ways of his own, neither very determined nor very risky, yet sometimes annoying. These sleights of his are intended, like those of others, deftly to dazzle the most sophisticated judges, and in so far betray a greater preoccupation with manner than with matter—a fault of proportion. The creative mind considers the manner solely as the servant of the import and justness of its theme. Thomas knew life after a fashion that was not the fashion he had intended to discover it in. The passionate young man hawks for experience with his fancy, but the quarry brought to his feet is not always that at which he let his falcon fly.

" 'He has robbed two clubs. The judge at Salisbury
Can't give him more than he undoubtedly
Deserves. The scoundrel! Look at his photograph!
A lady-killer! Hanging's too good by half
For such as he.' So said the stranger, one
With crimes yet undiscovered or undone.

But at the inn the Gipsy dame began :
'Now he was what I call a gentleman.
He went along with Carrie, and when she
Had a baby he paid up so readily
His half-a-crown. Just like him. A crown'd have been
More like him. For I never knew him mean.
Oh! but he was such a nice gentleman. Oh!
Last time we met he said if me and Joe
Was anywhere near we must be sure to call.
He put his arms around our Amos all
As if he were his own son. I pray God
Save him from justice! Nicer man never trod.' "

This is the spirit of Borrow rather than that of Wordsworth. Yet I divine a hankering for spiritual intensity akin to that of the more central master. These poems drift across a profound hunger for ideal human relations; like those floating gardens of Kashmir, they traverse an incommunicable want, as one of them says—

"content and discontent
As larks and swallows are perhaps with wings"

—an acceptance of the encountered actuality far less cavalier than that of the Tinman's antagonist. Though Thomas had waved a flag like those who throw their energies into a movement, the comrades tramping by his side and following were heard like echoes making his foot's thud sound all the more lonely. That heraldic picture of *Simple Life Returning* blazoned on the banner seemed no truer to his vision than those unsubstantial reverberations multiplying the plod-plod of his two feet; till he felt most solitary when agreement with him was most general. To adore remote places with quaint names became a fashion, but he retreated from prose to poetry in shy alarm.

The country and simple lives have their beauty, but

what is more obvious, they are picturesque, inventoried stage properties of well-worn appeal. This picturesqueness deludes men after they have despaired of more ideal beauties, such as can only be recognised in particular cases by very rare souls. For Wordsworth, country folk were the matrix out of which an ideal life might yet be moulded; his dearest thoughts and passionate aspirations rejoiced or suffered on their account. Deep country ancientness and Celtic magic had raised Thomas' enthusiasm, but his mind did not unite with what it admired, and gradually felt undeceived, and this disillusionment was closer to reality than his infatuation had been. At a cross-roads he says:

"I read the sign. Which way shall I go?
A voice says: 'You would not have doubted so
At twenty.' Another voice gentle with scorn
Says: 'At twenty you wished you had never been born.'"

Though doubtless minor disappointments intensified the feeling, in a general sense one would imagine that his birth vexed him because it had not befallen in a pastoral age, in Arcady, in Ireland when Cuchulain was about or in the Middle Ages when the oldest of existing barns was building. This soul, we say as we read, must have chafed against modern circumstance. Union with nature, between man and the most essential conditions of his life, such as that supposed to have been achieved in far-off times and places, has a true ideal value; it does correspond to a profound and rational aspiration. Honour then to its at times quaint and perverse expression! But observant eyes see more than they look for. And Thomas, who took pains to visit and know the most untouched parts of England and Wales, and who drank to the dregs the considerable literature which can feed such curiosity, though he still loved nature, was undeceived about man

and, as a corollary, about himself. It dawned upon him that man's need is nobler impulses rather than choicer circumstances, that the soul seeks a mood and should not be put off with hopes and desires, for we can only possess that which we can truly appreciate.

"When we two walked in Lent
We imagined that happiness
Was something different
And this was something less.

But happy were we to hide
Our happiness, not as they were
Who acted in their pride
Juno and Jupiter:

For the Gods in their jealousy
Murdered that wife and man,
And we that were wise live free
To recall our happiness then."

Thus many men and women look back at a full-illusioned youth with something of envy, and yet with a sense of freedom at the thought that those headstrong young people are really dead, which allows them to smile with the world, not in scorn of it, to be tender and kind instead of passionate and self-absorbed. Freedom from that fervid seriousness permits humorous playfulness, permits a vital possession of our own scorned past, and has gentle acceptance for the stream of shortcoming which is daily life.

"If every hour
Like this one passing that I have spent among
The wiser others when I have forgot
To wonder whether I was free or not,
Were piled before me, and not lost behind,
And I could take and carry them away
I should be rich; or if I had the power
To wipe out every one and not again
Regret, I should be rich to be so poor
And yet I still am half in love with pain. . . ."

What a contrast to Wordsworth, who always looked back to his youth as freshly arrived from heaven, and wished to bind maturity and age to it by conscious piety. He had been born free; Thomas achieved freedom at the cost of disillusionment; yet it was part of his latter-day riches that he had been so deceived long ago. Better so, than to have been without fire, than to have been dull, torpid and mean. Yes, yes; but not better than to have been a creative artist, thrilling and anguishing about work that was more important than the workman. But with freedom came the inspired moods at last, and prose gave way to poetry. This wanderer's vision had much in common with Ledwidge's vivid aptness of particular images and Clare's limpid sight.

"While the sweet last-left damsons from the bough
With spangles of the morning's storm drop down
Because the starling shakes it."

"The swift with wings and tail as sharp and narrow
As if the bow had flown off with the arrow."

"Like the touch of rain she was
On a man's flesh and hair and eyes."

"November's earth is dirty . . .
And the prettiest things on the ground are the paths
With morning and evening hobnails dinted,
With foot and wing-tip overprinted
Or separately charactered
Of little beast and little bird."

Such things must always make a poet supremely happy at whatever stage of life they may be written. And where there is simple joy, playfulness and tenderness will find room.

"If I should ever by chance grow rich
I'll buy Codham, Cockridden and Childerditch,
Roses, Pyrgo and Lapwater,
And let them all to my elder daughter.
The rent I shall ask of her will be only
Each year's first violets, white and lonely,
The first primroses and orchises—
She must find them before I do, that is.
But if she finds a blossom on furze
Without rent they shall for ever be hers,
Codham, Cockridden and Childerditch,
Roses, Pyrgo and Lapwater—
I shall give them all to my elder daughter."

And to his wife—

"And you, Helen, what should I give you?
So many things I would give you
Had I an infinite great store
Offered me and I stood before
To choose. I would give you youth,
All kinds of loveliness and truth,
A clear eye as good as mine,
Lands, waters, flowers, wine.
As many children as your heart
Might wish for, a far better art
Than mine can be, all you have lost
Upon the travelling waters tossed,
Or given to me. If I could choose
Freely in that great treasure-house
Anything from any shelf,
I would give you back yourself,
And power to discriminate
What you want and want it not too late,
Many fair days free from care
And heart to enjoy both foul and fair,
And myself, too, if I could find
Where it lay hidden and it proved kind."

The Muse rarely lays her hand for the first time on a man in his late thirties, and when this happens we ought not to be surprised if he proves himself a considerable

poet with complex and subtle moods. Thomas in this thin volume ranges from mere impressionism to creation as exquisite as this :

"The clouds that are so light,
Beautiful, swift and bright,
Cast shadows on field and park
Of the earth that is so dark,

And even so now, light one !
Beautiful, swift and bright one !
You let fall on a heart that was dark,
Unillumined, a deeper mark.

But clouds would have, without earth
To shadow, far less worth :
Away from your shadow on me
Your beauty less would be,

And if it still be treasured
An age hence, it shall be measured
By this small dark spot
Without which it were not."

A really finished and lovely poem, which will improve with long pondering and often repeating. This man had fought for his own freedom and won against considerable odds before he went out to fight for ours. Through his art, as under limpid water, one sees the opinionated savage youngster whom he first was, lying drowned, exclusive in his love of Celtic magic and deep-country ancientness, despising many fine things because he associated them with towns and globe-trotters ; but the real man's soul with its depth and stillness has charmed all that turbulence, so that it now lies like a picture of itself under glass. Not born free, but self-freed like a plant that lifts a stone, or a sapling that splits a rock before it can show the world its proper beauty, and, for us discovered, like that hooded wayfarer at the supper-table only recognised

after he has vanished, as better than our kindest thoughts had dared suppose. Our house was not well ordered, he should not have had to write hastily for his own and his children's bread, we have lost the chance of using him to the best advantage; yet he leaves us more than we deserved, something that will be treasured by posterity for ever. As his body fell, its cloak melted off the soul and we caught a glimpse which confounded our poor recollections of the man, and words of his still tolling round our ears make us aware that for him this dark casualty had a different meaning.

"Here love ends,
Despair, ambition ends,
All pleasure and all trouble,
Although most sweet or bitter,
Here ends in sleep that is sweeter
Than tasks most noble.

There is not any book
Or face of dearest look
That I would not turn from now
To go into the unknown
I must enter and leave alone
I know not how.

The tall forest towers;
Its cloudy foliage lowers
Ahead, shelf above shelf;
Its silence I hear and obey
That I may lose my way
And myself."

# F. W. HARVEY

"FLOWER-LIKE and shy
You stand, sweet mortal, at the river's brim:
With what unconscious grace
Your limbs to some strange law surrendering
Which lifts you clear of our humanity!

Now would I sacrifice
Your breathing, warmth, and all the strange romance
Of living to a moment! Ere you break
The greater thing than you, I would my eyes
Were basilisk to turn you to a stone.
So should you be the world's inheritance,
And souls of unborn men should draw their breath
From mortal you, immortalised in Death." [1]

Human beauty, that "greater thing than you," haunts mankind. Its complex attraction maddens not only saints and artists but every honest heart. To arrest it, to keep it steadily in view is our greatest need, yet like the wind it is here and is gone. Having moved men like a hurricane to prove by devastation that their race or their religion is its chosen vehicle, it will be content to fondle a child with caressing indulgence, turning her self-will "to favour and to prettiness." Generations have sought to mew it in a sentence, to immortalise it as the memory of a man or the record of a god's visit. Some have claimed that only perfect form could express it, while others find eloquent a "visage more marred than that of any man," capable of suffering a greater persecution than any other creature. The notion that this revelation may wholly possess one of ourselves, one who may stand emptied of it like a vacant house an hour hence, is old and beautiful. Yes, one lovely moment of a

[1] "*Gloucestershire Friends*. By Lieutenant F. W. Harvey. Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd. 2s. 6d. Quotations by permission of Mrs Harvey and of Bishop Frodsham.

single life may have uttered what millions of completed lives have stammered over unintelligibly; this thought begets that agony of fondness that would entrust the brief perfection of young persons to stone or metal rather than leave it to fading flesh. Elroy Flecker, a young poet recently dead, rivals the beautiful lines quoted above with a similar invention:

"Had I the power
To Midas given of old
To touch a flower
And leave its petals gold,
I then might touch thy face,
Delightful boy,
And leave a metal grace
A graven joy.

Thus would I slay—
Ah, desperate device!
The vital day
That trembles in thine eyes,
And let the red lips close
Which sang so well
And drive away the rose
To leave a shell."

This vivid estimation of human beauty is proof of a deep well of poetic power.

"Star of my soul, thou gazest
Upon the starry skies;
I envy Heaven, that watches
Thy face with countless eyes."[1]

So Plato sang, and still, in spite of astronomy; the worth of this soul-thrilled comeliness can counterbalance the magnitude of stellar regions and remove all terror from the unclouded night. So great a power has human beauty when we are alone with ourselves; and yet few

[1] Translated by Kenneth Freeman: *Schools of Hellas.*

ideas have had less weight in councils of war and parliaments of peace. Commerce has been permitted to oppress and ambition to outrage it to any extent.

But let us return to the poem I first cited. Lieutenant Harvey, who won the D.C.M. as lance-corporal, was allowed by the German authorities to send it and a little volume of others home from the prison camp at Gütersloh. Many judges would not admit that his poem is a rival to Flecker's, and the last couplet does weaken its effect; but then Flecker weakened his by two stanzas which I have not quoted. Lt. Harvey's volume gives proof of a varied and powerful soul; but it peeps at us from a prison of trivial amusement, banal tricks and rhymes, things that Flecker was all his short poet-life at conscious war with, staving them further and further back from his small garden of verse; whereas Harvey hardly seems conscious that they confine and baffle the wings of his Pegasus. The gleams of pure poetry that flash past the bars of his everyday mentality are not alone passages of felicity, but there are also fine inevitable poem-shapes, marred in execution—not so much, as in Sorley's case, from lack of time to finish; no, rather as though a strange, insensitive, surface-personality intervened and "gambolled from the matter" in repeating what had been conceived. When I first read his volume I said, "No, I cannot write about this man," and laid it aside for weeks; then I happened to open it at the lines I have quoted and immediately began to search for other signs of power in the mass of smart or pretty trifles, and I found a few. He addresses a fallen comrade—

"Swift-footed, fleeter yet
Of heart. Swift to forget
The petty spite that life or men could show you:
Your last long race is won,
But beyond the sound of gun
You laugh and help men onward—if I know you."

But we wonder whether he had himself heard the rhythm of the first three lines when we next read—

" O still you laugh and walk
  And sing and frankly talk."

A doubt arises even over the second three lines—the fatal influence of a trick of facile rhyming seems already to tame in them the soaring stroke—but with this last couplet we are waddling on ground.

" What is it the breeze says
  In London streets to-day
  Unto the troubled trees
  Whose shadows strew the way,
  Whose leaves are all a-flutter ?

  ' You are wild ! ' the rascal cries.
  The green tree beats its wings
  And fills the air with sighs.
  ' Wild ! wild ! ' the rascal sings.
  But your feet are in the gutter !

  Men pass beneath the trees
  Walking the pavement grey,
  They hear the whisperings tease
  And at the word he utters
  Their hearts are green and gay.

  Then like the gay, green trees,
  They beat proud wings to fly,
  But like the fluttering trees,
  Their footprints mark the gutters
  Until the beggars die."

This poem has great beauty of structure; it follows an inevitable course from outstart to the happy last line. Yet the first line for the sake of a pat rhyme is contorted and rendered ambiguous to the ear and really runs—

" What is it says the breeze "—

which seems to demand punctuation thus—

" ' What is it ? ' says the breeze "—

whereas the sense is as I have amended it. Besides this, the two latter stanzas distinctly fall off in aptness of phrase as compared with the first two.

The poems entitled *Recognition* and *The Little Road* and the first of the two Ballades are also not only truly inspired and well designed, but spoilt in similar ways. His interests and sentiments have perhaps a wider range than with most of these poets, and are almost all commendable and endearing, only it is expression makes the poet, and here the general effect is easy-going and commonplace. No doubt the facility with which he is amused by the first-coming features of his own work and of the world is a sign of youth, and makes his width of range the more promising. It is rare indeed to find in work, the general allure of which is so casual, lines so just, direct and impassioned as were the first five I quoted from him, moving with their own movement, uncontrolled by the conventional notions of form which are habitual with their author; and they certainly should set expectancy on tiptoe for what he will produce during the next few years. Every honest heart is at moments maddened by a glimpse of beauty in behaviour or in persons: then their thought suddenly darts upward as though a robin were possessed by the soul of a lark. Was this such a moment, or are the other poems the tawdry swaddling of a still unconscious master ? Ability there is plenty of; his mundane effectiveness may reach the level of Kipling's.

"In general, if you want a man to do a dangerous job :—
Say, swim the Channel, climb St Paul's, or break into and rob
The Bank of England, why, you find his wages must be higher
Than if you merely wanted him to light the kitchen fire.
But in the British Army it's just the other way,
And the maximum of danger means the minimum of pay."

Perhaps in the future all journalists may be trained to this degree of cunning, and then, perhaps before the end of time, they may sicken even the average man with smartness in verse.

Strangest of all, this lover of beauty and this captive of momentary effect have been once at least fused consciously and inextricably in a single poem, a successful poem.

THE BUGLER

God dreamed a man;
Then, having firmly shut
Life like a precious metal in his fist
Withdrew, His labour done. Thus did begin
Our various divinity and sin.
For some to ploughshares did the metal twist,
And others—dreaming empires—straightway cut
Crowns for their aching foreheads. Others beat
Long nails and heavy hammers for the feet
Of their forgotten Lord. (Who dares to boast
That he is guiltless?) Others coined it: most
Did with it—simply nothing. (Here again
Who cries his innocence?) Yet doth remain
Metal unmarred, to each man more or less,
Whereof to fashion perfect loveliness.

For me, I do but bear within my hand
(For sake of Him our Lord, now long forsaken)
A simple bugle such as may awaken
With one high morning note a drowsing man:
That wheresoe'er within my motherland
The sound may come, 'twill echo far and wide
Like pipes of battle calling up a clan,
Trumpeting men through beauty to God's side.

Second thoughts are best, and this seems made entirely of first thoughts; images, attitude, everything; and yet it is inevitably shaped to a whole that is itself throughout. The mad passion for beauty can do so much even with

cheap and hackneyed material. In the uncouth, though familiar, garb of crazy common-sense this young soldier stands among the crowd and blows his bugle, half conscious of the drab disguise, half hoping it will fall and he find himself naked as Achilles; and why should he not open his eyes and "behold the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire"?

# RICHARD ALDINGTON

As the year nineteen hundred approached and was passed young men said: "We are the new century. How shall we differ from the old?" And elder folk said: "Of course the new century must be different; let us try and welcome it." Young poets, who wish to prove that they are a new sort, embrace theories and think that these lend them importance; obviously they have not produced enough work to claim the authority of masters, so they must needs borrow if they wish to impose. Unfortunately, theory describes art but cannot create. No work succeeds because it conforms to rules; bad and good works alike exemplify the practice of all schools.

The "Imagists" are one small twig of a branch of the new tree made by forking movements. They plead that they are not rebels, and point out how, at least in English, verse free from rhyme and conventional rhythms has always existed; besides, they admire, nay worship, the past. None the less they publish a manifesto, and prove their doctrine to be impressionistic.

"The 'exact' word does not mean the word which exactly describes the object in itself, it means the 'exact' word which brings the effect of that object before the reader as it presented itself to the poet's mind at the time of writing the poem."[1]

The value of a poem cannot consist in informing us how a poet felt at a given moment; it may tell us this, but its value will lie in the quality of his feeling and the felicity with which it takes shape. This form is a growth like other organisms. If, as it grows, the poet says, "But I did not feel like this or think of that when the impulse started me off; I am adulterating my inspiration with afterthoughts," he checks and thwarts this growth,

[1] *Some Imagist Poets.* Constable & Co. 1915. Quotations by permission of Lieutenant Richard Aldington.

and turns his work into a scientific document about how he once felt, which possibly has very little interest for science.

The effect of this mistake is clearly seen in the triviality and poverty of many Imagist poems. But Nature takes no notice of creeds and sects and nicknames, and has given Richard Aldington such love of beauty as amounts almost to passion, and to H. D., his wife and compeer, such passion as must create beauty, despite no matter what crippling theory. There is, of course, no such thing as legitimate or illegitimate among æsthetic means and forms. Success in fulfilling its own nature is the sole criterion by which a poem should be judged. This happy couple are scholars as well as poets, and have contributed excellent work to The Poets' Translation Series.

A lover of beauty is hurt every day in London, where ruthless commercialism has produced a hell almost as dreadful as that created by ruthless militarism in Flanders. Such a man feels and resents a nameless hostility, yet he may deem it a kind of desertion to take refuge in dreams of old Italy and ancient Greece. He wishes to be loyal to his own day even if it can only be by enlarging on his sufferings.

WHITECHAPEL [1]

NOISE!
Iron hoofs, iron wheels, iron din
Of drays and trams and feet passing;
Iron
Beaten to a vast mad cacophony.

In vain the shrill, far cry
Of swallows sweeping by:
In vain the silence and green
Of meadows Apriline;
In vain the clear white rain—

[1] *Images*. Richard Aldington. The Poetry Bookshop.

Soot; mud;
A nation maddened with labour;
Interminable collision of energies—
Iron beating upon iron,
Smoke whirling upwards,
Speechless, impotent.

In vain the shrill, far cry
Of kittiwakes that fly
Where the sea waves leap green.
The meadows Apriline—

Noise, iron, smoke;
Iron, Iron, Iron.

To my ear and understanding this is improved by the omission of lines 1, 11, 16, 21 and 22. Accumulations of nouns and adjectives are characteristic of imagists, inelegancies of syntax give much of their work the air of a translation, as though the difficulty of following a foreign idiom had overstrained the resources of the writer.

## PEOPLE

Why should you try to crush me?
Am I so Christ-like?

You beat against me
Immense waves, filthy with refuse.
I am the last upright of a smashed breakwater,
But you shall not crush me
Though you bury me in foaming slime
And hiss your hatred about me.

You break over me, cover me;
I shudder at the contact;
Yet I pierce through you
And stand up, torn, dripping, shaken,
But whole and fierce.

I sit here, shading my eyes,
Peeping at you, watching you,
Thinking.

Good! He is truly himself, but the mood has hardly momentum enough to create perfect form. But when at last we get passion we get song.

AFTER TWO YEARS

SHE is all so slight
And tender and white
As a May morning.
She walks without hood
At dusk. It is good
To hear her sing.

It is God's will
That I shall love her still
As He loves Mary.
And night and day
I will go forth to pray
That she love me.

There is a third stanza, but it rather detracts from these two, which are perfect in and by themselves.

Since I wrote the above Richard Aldington has augmented his gift to the world by two tiny volumes.[1] *Reverie* and *The Love Poems of Myrrhine and Konallis.* This last adds a new facet to his talent, for it covers the same ground as *Les Amours de Bilitis,* by Pierre Louis, compared to which these paragraphs seem shrunk, faint and uninspired. Unenglish pedantries such as "golden-hyacinth-curled hair" or "golden-wrought knees" or "vine-leaf-carved armlet" affect us like the despair of a translator after scratching his head for a long time. "Gold-flowered-crowned drink" indeed! A rhetorical

[1] Privately issued by Charles C. Bubb at his Private Press, Cleveland. 1917.

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use of such adjectives as white, swift, silver, golden, also detracts from that physical precision which is the glory of English. Yet the choice perfume of these poems haunts the mind. Christian civilisation has in nothing so failed to uphold its Founder's criterions as in censoriousness. Moral disparagement of one sort or another permeates it. "Judge not that ye be not judged" looms from far in the dim and impracticable. Young men are, however, often open-minded and gentle towards sexual licentiousness; it comes easily to them. Allowing for this, I still think that these spare paragraphs, which so poorly represent strophes, are redolent with that temper which not only refrains from censure, but does not judge, though in his case armed with what is called "the best right to." These outworn forms of pagan life are regarded simply and graciously, if a trifle fondly. So to cherish distant things is rare; and their faded colours revive under its kindness, as the dust-scored effacement of some broken shell of a freshly excavated vase might be vivified by a passing shower.

H. D. takes us into another world, the tragic world of those who strive with the Sphinx. Is what we see controlled from the outside, or does the cosmos live? Are we ourselves shaped by inspiration or by the pressure of conditions? And if there are two forces, which will be master in the long run? Passionate minds grapple with this problem; their doubts, their faiths, their despairs are the result. Goethe's *Prometheus* is the first modern poem that shakes us with these emotions, and declares unending war on all external tyrants, however strong. His maturity could not finish what he had written; the crisis was past, less tragic questions engrossed his attention; but I venture to think that H. D.'s *Pygmalion* touches as great moments as did his insuppressibly creative Titan whose defiance cries out to Zeus:

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"Here sit I, and fashion men
After mine own image,
Of like temper with me,
To suffer and weep,
To enjoy and rejoice
And heed thee as little
As I."

Leopardi and Arnold have since produced great poems in this key: the doomed fragility of the lovely broom bush on the slopes of Vesuvius is an apt and moving image for the despair inspired by the stupendous inequality between what is exquisite within and brutal without; and in Arnold's *Empedocles* the despair of the man who has neglected life for thought is strangely capped by youth's serene joy in the harmonious world which it inherits. But H. D.'s sculptor, whose statues come to life, not, as in the old story, to content as a mistress or comfort as a wife, but silently to leave him in disdain, or as though they were of too different a nature to commune with him, discovers new abysses of tragic emotion for the indomitable creator's loneliness, ignorance and relative insignificance.

The poem is too long and ill put together to quote as a whole. Too many images are used: that of fire, that of heat, and that of light, no doubt of intense distinctness to the writer, collide together and confuse the reader, who has not shared the long meditations which preceded the pangs and joys of creation. Fortunately by simple omission a satisfying simplicity can be obtained.

PYGMALION

. . . . .

I MADE god upon god
Step from the cold rock,
I made the gods less than men,
For I was a man and they my work.

. . . . .

And now what is it that has come to pass ?

. . . . . .

"Each of the gods, perfect
Cries out from a perfect throat :
You are useless ;
No marble can bind me
No stone suggest.
They have melted into the light
And I am desolate.
They have melted
Each from his plinth,
Each one departs.

They have gone :
What agony can express my grief ?
Each from his marble base
Has stepped into the light
And my work is for naught."

And after this, though before the passage occurs in the poem, the bereaved sculptor enters on an agony of interpretation.

"Which am I
The stone or the power
Which lifts the rock from the earth ? "

Or again—

"Which is the god,
Which the stone
The god takes for his use ? "

The question debated would seem to be whether he was the power which created those gods or whether he himself had been made by the power which took them away. Is he himself the god ? "or is this arrogance ? " or are they, his handiwork, the power that shapes him unperceived ? But although most of it is pregnant with splendid suggestions, I can make neither head nor tail of it as it stands. Now what I have quoted is grander poetry than anything

I have read, either in French or in English, produced by the so-called rebel poets. This cry over the soul's effort that is lost in the world is grander than anything I have quoted from these Soldier Poets. Have we not seen man's wonderful creations go out from the workshop and join themselves to the hostile gods, the inclement conditions of his life. How many creeds, how many social orders that seemed stable and trustworthy have melted into air! or, like soiled and rusting weapons, gangrened wounds dealt those they were fashioned to defend! Vast wealth, created at immense cost in toil, in shame, in wrong and in suffering, is even now being used to damage and destroy men on a huger scale than earthquakes achieve. This image goes deeper than the forlorn agony of the artist; it is a universal tragedy that what we make makes us and then breaks us like a hostile power; and can we know that we are shaped by divinity, when it is the outside pressure that hews roughly and desecrates our hopes? Passion and power are present in others of H. D.'s poems, but nowhere else so successfully.

Like Orestes and Electra, this young poet and poetess stand hand in hand, and a sculptor might well draw a splendid inspiration from their intrepidity; but perhaps painting could better express how they face the colossal wickedness of the modern world and its tragedy, as the children of Agamemnon faced the cumulative murderous treacheries of "Pelops' line." Young, severe, and determined to live and die in defence of that ideal beauty that for us as for them is called Greece, let us picture them under the dark pall of the war, but behind them a glimpse of those blue seas and temple-crowned cliffs. Or shall he show her his hands as in a little prose poem written from the trenches?

"I am grieved for our hands, our hands that have caressed roses and women's flesh, old lovely books and

marbles of Carrara. I am grieved for our hands that were so reverent in beauty's service, so glad of beauty's tresses, hair and silken robe and gentle fingers, so glad of beauty of bronze and wood and stone and rustling parchment. So glad, so reverent, so white. . . .

"I am grieved for our hands. . . ."

She holds the torch near to look and its light floods her face, while he smiles, for she reveals her own unconscious beauty in the act of pitying his hands, blunted, stiffened and begrimed by his foul task.

# ALAN SEEGER

LOVE, arms and song, and a noble frankness that asserts, "My kingdom is of this world," characterise America's leading soldier poet, who fell in action on 4th July 1916.

Alan Seeger was born in New York in 1888, of old New England parentage. For ten years Staten Island, in the mouth of the harbour, was his home. Later the family settled at Mexico City, in the tropics, but 7400 feet above the sea. He entered Harvard in 1906 and came to Paris in 1912, and, when the war broke out, was among the first half-hundred of his countrymen to enlist in the Foreign Legion of France, and soon writes from the Front:

"I have always thirsted for this kind of thing, to be present where the pulsations are liveliest. Every minute here is worth weeks of ordinary experience. . . . This will spoil one for any other kind of life. . . . Death is nothing terrible after all. It may mean something even more wonderful than life. It cannot possibly mean anything worse to a good soldier. . . . Success in life means doing that thing than which nothing else conceivable seems more noble or satisfying or remunerative, and this enviable state I can truly say I enjoy, for had I the choice, I would be nowhere else in the world than where I am." [1]

From him as from Grenfell this sentiment comes inevitably; and he was no soldier by profession, but, in so far as he had chosen any, a poet. At first sight they seem twin natures in ardour, in frankness, in courage, in devotion; only gradually can the spirit become reconciled to admitting an immense difference.

The temptation is to apply here the common English prejudice as to where the American fails. But this would be uncritical, for exceptional natures least conform to

[1] *Poems by Alan Seeger*. Introduction by W. Archer. Constable & Co. Quotations by permission of C. L. Seeger, Esq., and Messrs Constable.

national foibles. Seeger contrasts with Grenfell as Byron with Shelley rather than as Yankee with Britisher. Only by crushing the grapes of his thought against a fine palate shall we be able to distinguish their flavour from very highly prized fruit. After a few pages his clarity, like that of Swinburne, confuses the reader, for if his virtue is not to hesitate, his fault is to let the thread sag in the hurry and volume of eloquence; and this great fluency and facility accompany a lack of delicate choicefulness. In vain you search for such precision in joy as inspired Ledwidge's happiest images, or for details that amount to revelations as did Thomas's best. All kinds of beauty are welcomed, but too indiscriminately. "You will say they are Persian attire; but let them be changed," is the instinctive comment of many resolute minds on encountering to-day that flaunting habit which ranges women and wine in a single category. Rakish nakedness offends their studied composure, and others may be surprised to find neither fatigue, hopelessness nor cynicism in the voice that proclaims:

"And in old times I should have prayed to her
Whose haunt the groves of windy Cyprus were,
To prosper me and crown with good success
My will to make of you the rose-twined bowl
From whose inebriating brim my soul
Shall drink its last of earthly happiness."

This is from one of a series of sonnets written during leave from the Front. Another with the same object pursues:

"Enchanting girl, my faith is not a thing
By futile prayers and vapid psalm-singing
To vent in crowded nave and public pew.
My creed is simple: that the world is fair,
And beauty the best thing to worship there,
And I confess it by adoring you."

And this world is defied as gallantly as the other:

"Let not propriety nor prejudice
Nor the precepts of jealous age deny
What Sense so incontestably affirms;
Cling to the blessed moment and drink deep
Of the sweet cup it tends, as there alone
Were that which makes life worth the pain to live."

Nay, not even death, and what dreams may follow, can give him pause:

"Exiled afar from youth and happy love,
If Death should ravish my fond spirit hence
I have no doubt but, like a homing dove,
It would return to its dear residence,
And through a thousand stars find out the road
Back into earthly flesh that was its loved abode."

Neither heaven nor the possibilities of time and space can offer anything better, a return to known delights is all that can be desired. The old have not infrequently gazed back with something of this feeling, and the illusions of perspective may excuse them; but that a young man should be so certain that he has seen the bottom of the cup of happiness, and that it could never be refilled with rarer liquors, suggests a near-sighted imagination. So masterful a conviction that no finer means than those you were born with could achieve more exquisite ends sets the mind pondering; and a plausible philosophy might maintain that youth's vivid apprehension of the worth of actual objects, persons and events was the source of all significance, the criterion by which everything else is really judged. Wordsworth could almost have subscribed to this belief; he expressed a very similar intuition though with a less truculent directness. In fact I think this comparison brings home to us a failure in the mood of Alan Seeger's ecstasy. We have all met these gifted young men who seem to tread above the

heads of the crowd; perhaps most of us can recall something of how it feels inside them. The most coy have known the itch to swagger, the most staid have longed to shout from the house-top, and modesty itself has desired to stand forth naked and unashamed; so that a deep and widespread welcome greets these manifestations even among those who dare not avow their approval and whose lives would contradict them if they did. Wordsworth himself confessed that he had not written love poems because if he had done so they would have been too warm for publication.

"All true speech and large avowal
Which the jealous soul concedes,
All man's heart that brooks bestowal,
All frank faith which passion breeds."

are of the very essence of poetry, and will be cherished by every loyal nature. Propriety is forbidden to intervene when soul communes with soul, her sphere is downstairs in the world of half relations and approximate intercourse. But in proportion as you claim to go naked, you must keep near to the heart of things, and make the very truth your inseparable companion. Anything off-hand, anything insensitive or not quite alive offends these communicants, like the touch of a corpse. Humbleness like that of a child is born from this intensity. Any thought of the myriad eyes that overpeer a stage should be impossible; the world is forgotten when the spirit dances naked in the light to which joy entrusts it—tender joy for whom the damage of the pale green, ruby-eyed, lace-winged fly is a calamity to avert with tears and supplications. "Everything that lives is holy." If Seeger lives in his poetry, everything else passes like a ghost, like a reference only: his one imperious desire is to cast a personal spell upon us all. Will not something unmistakably itself arrest this fervid eloquence that deals in clouds and stars

and all the commonplaces of poetry with such profusion! Were but the young women addressed, ever qualified by an adjective proper to some one girl! No, Alan Seeger is alone felt, with this delightful freshness, a presence, an inspiration!

"Sidney, in whom the hey-day of romance
Came to its precious and most perfect flower,
Whether you turneyed with victorious lance
Or brought sweet roundelays to Stella's bower,
I give myself some credit for the way
I have kept clean of what enslaves and lowers,
Shunned the ideals of our present day
And studied those that were esteemed in yours—
For, turning from the mob that buys Success
By sacrificing all Life's better part,
Down the free roads of human happiness
I frolicked, poor of purse but light of heart,
And lived in strict devotion all along
To my three idols—Love and Arms and Song."

"I could accuse myself of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me. . . . We are arrant knaves all"—in speaking thus was Hamlet so certainly mad as this sonnet implies? The worry and stress that "honesty of purpose and intellectual honesty" cost Grenfell are remembered with regret.

"I cannot rest
While aught of beauty in any path untrod
Swells into bloom and spreads sweet charms abroad
Unworshipped of my love. I cannot see
In Life's profusion and passionate brevity
How hearts enamoured of life can strain too much
In one long tension to hear, to see, to touch."

He is too eager, too arrogant, to await the visit of those wonders which steal unsought into consciousness. A "wise passiveness" was no mood of his. His ambition emulates Byron's, who hated to think himself a mere poet

and itched for acted glory: thus Seeger, gazing beyond the war's end, cries:

"And the great cities of the world shall yet
Be golden frames for me in which to set
New masterpieces of more rare romance."

He fears no repetition of that defeat which yet enchanted the world with its misanthropy and cynicism, but strains after a vision fellow to that followed by the pilgrim lord from Harrow to Missolonghi. If in spite of failure this temperament achieved so much, what might it not succeed in? So active, so independent, so daring a nature has as many opportunities of acquiring wisdom as it has of refusing to bow its head under ruin. Though a soul consciously poses while loving, though when heroic it must be setting an example to half the world, this effrontery, largely inexperience, may betoken the very vigour that can grapple with the monster fact on the soul's behalf. Already he can philosophise his preoccupation with sexual passion.

"Oh Love whereof my boyhood was the dream
My youth the beautiful novitiate,
Life was so slight a thing and thou so great,
How could I make thee less than all supreme!
In thy sweet transports not alone I thought
Mingled the twain that panted breast to breast,
The sun and stars throbbed with them; they were caught
Into the pulse of Nature. . . .

Doubt not that of a perfect sacrifice
That soul partakes whose inspiration fills
The spring-time and the depth of summer skies
The rainbow and the clouds behind the hills,
That excellence in earth and air and sea
That makes things as they are the real divinity."

Yes, his brain keeps pace with his eloquence; but his soul? Hasty and crude and licensed to scorn the

maimed and mauled by youth's ignorance of irreparable damage, he does not hesitate, on returning to the trenches, to offer his gallant comrades these ungenerous lines which were possibly not really aimed at the invalids he had met at Biarritz, but at those whom he could never forget, his equals in youth and strength, who then still lingered in the States.

"Apart sweet women (for whom heaven be blessed),
Comrades, you cannot think how thin and blue
Look the left-overs of mankind that rest,
Now that the cream has been skimmed off in you.
. . . we turn disdainful backs
On that poor world we scorn, yet die to shield,—
That world of cowards, hypocrites and fools."

He has given himself for the freedom of all future souls, what right have we to question whether he gave his own conscience due reverence? Could we have divined *King Lear* from reading *Venus and Adonis*? That ready aptness of phrase which in my citations has delighted the reader is constantly achieved in his later poems, if only by four or six lines at a time. And though the inspired peaks rise tier behind tier above this plateau, you find few flowers more brilliant without climbing higher. Yet that failure in delicate choicefulness insistently prophesies woe, and was not so striking in Swinburne or more so in Byron at his years. *The Deserted Garden*, his longest poem, yielded as abundant opportunities as *Venus and Adonis* could, but no line like

"A lily prisoned in a gale of snow"

takes the advantage. In spite of formlessness, how delightful the Keats of *Endymion* would have made this old Mexican garden, where the young Seeger dreams the meetings of bygone lovers. He, however, only maintains his obvious efficiency, and we are never "surprised with joy": in the end we are only surprised that he can keep

it up, as we often have been when Swinburne was not first rate. Did the magnolia bud of this large soul lodge a canker? Yet, though we can only surmise what his full-blown splendour might have been, he was ever so slightly opening; his latest sonnets are not only the most manifold, but deeper and almost fragrant.

"Seeing you have not come with me, nor spent
This day's suggestive beauty as we ought,
I have gone forth alone and been content
To make you mistress only of my thought."

"I am the field of undulating grass
And you the gentle perfume of the Spring,
And all my lyric being, when you pass,
Is bowed and filled with sudden murmuring."

"For I have ever gone untied and free,
The stars and my high thoughts for company;
Wet with the salt spray and the mountain showers,
I have had the sense of space and amplitude,
And love in many places, silver-shoed,
Has come and scattered all my path with flowers."

Four lines from two sonnets, six from a third, and you build up a new one richer and stronger than any of the three. For all these flashes are like the flap of a flame in a swirl of smoke; some pleasure in his own attitude, some self-assertion causes the momentary brilliance among the ever-flowing grey ghosts of scheduled ornament which make the bulk of a rhetorical style. But he has gentle, more promising moods.

"There have been times when I could storm and plead,
But you shall never hear me supplicate.
These long months that have magnified my need
Have made my asking less importunate;
For now small favours seem to me so great
That not the courteous lovers of old time
Were more content to rule themselves and wait,
Easing desire with discourse and sweet rhyme."

He even stands staring at the different tempers created in him by self-seeking and self-devotion.

"Oh love of woman, you are known to be
A passion sent to plague the hearts of men;
For every one you bring felicity
Bringing rebuffs and wretchedness to ten.
I have been oft where human life sold cheap
And seen men's brains spilled out about their ears
And yet that never cost me any sleep;
I lived untroubled and I shed no tears.
Fools prate how war is an atrocious thing;
I always knew that nothing it implied
Equalled the agony and suffering
Of him who loves and loves unsatisfied.
War is a refuge to a heart like this;
Love only tells it what true torture is."

Playing his part with the best at the Front, he was by no means merely acting a *Message to America* in order to bring her into line. He really loved France and understood something of what she stands for in civilisation. He is compact with generosity which is none the less real for being self-appreciated.

"O friends, in your fortunate present ease
(Yet faced by the self-same facts as these),
If you would see how a race can soar
That has no love, but no fear of war,
How each can turn from his private rôle
That all may act as a perfect whole,
How men can live up to the place they claim,
And a nation jealous of its good name,
Be true to its proud inheritance,
Oh, look over here and learn from France!"

And he too seeks to think well of Death, and, having most fancied himself as a lover, thinks himself "half in love with" glorious Death.

"I know not if in risking my best days
I shall leave utterly behind me here
This dream that lightened me through lonesome ways
And that no disappointment made less dear;
Sometimes I think that, where the hill-tops rear
Their white entrenchments back of tangled wire,
Behind the mist Death only can make clear,
There, like Brunhilde ringed with flaming fire,
Lies what shall ease my heart's immense desire:
There, where beyond the horror and the pain
Only the brave shall pass, only the strong attain."

But from a greater depth comes the simple fatalism which informs his finest sayings about life and love.

MAKTOOB

A SHELL surprised our post one day
And killed a comrade at my side;
My heart was sick to see the way
He suffered as he died.

I dug about the place he fell,
And found, no bigger than my thumb,
A fragment of the splintered shell
In warm aluminum.

I melted it and made a mould
And poured it in the opening
And worked it, when the cast was cold,
Into a shapely ring.

And when my ring was smooth and bright,
Holding it on a rounded stick,
For seal, I bade a Turco write
Maktoob in Arabic.

Maktoob! "'Tis written!" So they think,
These children of the desert, who
From its immense expanses drink
Some of its grandeur too.

And after some less convincing circumstance of entry to a Valhalla he ends by telling how these graven characters calm him.

"When not to hear some try to talk,
And some to clean their guns and sing,
And some dig deeper in the chalk—
I look upon my ring:

And nerves relax that were most tense,
And Death comes whistling down unheard,
As I consider all the sense
Held in that mystic word.

And it brings, quieting like balm
My heart whose flutterings have ceased,
The resignation and the calm
And wisdom of the East."

Ample quotation seemed needed to illumine this soldier's fine attitude. His style takes no end of room; more time was demanded than love and arms could spare for it to grow as rare as it was large. Still, granted a more prolonged lease of pleasure-hunting, we might have had to deplore luxuriance tangled to perversity, no longer merely grown too fast for strength. To what extent war was a tonic to his extravagance remains uncertain, even after repeated readings of his later poems. Every young man has perforce many possible careers—unwritten books whose titles and contents we may dream of, though hands will never part their leaves, nor eyes peruse. Still there is some faint compensation for this in esteeming them at their highest possible value, though it but increase our sense of loss; for worth conceived is prophetic of that yet to be revealed by the ever-teeming future.

Look at him crowning himself, prematurely, as Shakespeare's hero prince did, yet, like him, conscious of deserving the "rigol" by innate capacity and determina-

tion. Both hands raise the empty hoop, then pause, for through it stars watch him, brilliant and remote. In black bronze he stands for ever returning their gaze—no work of Phidias, rather by some Scopas or Praxiteles, whose more indulgent rhythm induces a musical ripple throughout the war-hardened muscles of his twenty-eight years.

# THE BEST POETRY

I SHALL attempt to show you why the best poetry usually passes unobserved, and how you may train yourselves to recognise it.

Matthew Arnold, our greatest literary critic in the last century, thought that if we were to draw full benefit from poetry "we must accustom ourselves to a high standard and to a strict judgment," and thus learn to recognise "the best in poetry."

No easy task, you think.

Yet the means whereby it may be accomplished are simple.

First: A habit of making the mind up as to which poem among those we read satisfies us best; not to rest there, nor until we know whether the whole poem causes our admiration or whether parts of it are only accepted as introduction or sequel to this or that passage; till, if possible, we discriminate the most perfect line, phrase or rhythm.

Secondly: A determination to become intimate only with verse that stands the test of our most active moods, instead of letting the luckless day, with its relaxed temper, console itself with something that we have perceived to be second-rate. For in proportion as we are loyal to our taste, it will become more difficult to please until at last a really sound judgment is acquired.

Perhaps you will think I speak too confidently, and that good taste in poetry is not within the reach of every honest endeavour.

For a while please imagine that you may be mistaken, and admit that the method of developing taste is possibly both simple and native to mankind.

Difficulty really arises through the mind's preoccupations, which prevent a sufficiency of consideration being applied to æsthetic experience. So manifold and strong

are these distractions that perhaps not more than half-a-dozen men in a generation continue to form their taste through many years together.

The probability of this will appear if we roughly sketch the accidents which deter us from persevering, even though we leave out of sight all those which deprive taste of opportunity, and indicate merely such as induce bad habits of mind.

Many readers, supposing them to have set out unprejudiced, may soon be committed to praise or blame, and then prove reluctant to revise and reject those so confident judgments. This unwillingness to renounce infallibility already seduces their minds to continue a higher strain of praise or a more rigorous blame than now appears due; and such disloyalty spreading will even blight the roots of admiration.

More modest souls are, on the contrary, all ears for others' opinions; yet the very openness of their minds may let in such a crowd of contradictory voices that in the din and confusion their own poor reason, unable to hold its own, by degrees acquiesces in silence.

Some, again, read verse so quickly or in such quantities that energy fails them for searching, sifting and listening to their genuine impressions with ardour and thoroughness: while others will desist from effort through mere indolence, and so making fewer and fewer discoveries of excellence, will gradually take less interest in poetry, till they no longer find it worth while to read any.

Then there are those who conclude that great poets produce nothing but great poetry, and drown their taste in forced admiration for a sea of failure, since success crowns the efforts of poetical geniuses far less frequently than those of skilled artisans.

Taste, in minds more orderly than appreciative, is often suffocated by scholarship. Knowledge concerning man, period or text absorbs them, till beauty, whose

supposed presence was their pretext for study, is habitually overlooked by their familiarity.

Again, ardent partisans will find the poetry whose beauty most delights them tainted with convictions to which they are opposed—heterodox religious dogmas, or ultra Tory or ultra Radical theories with which they have no patience: or it may even happen that some true poet shocks their respectability with what they can honestly call gross immorality.

In all these ways, and many more, men habitually stunt and adulterate their taste instead of allowing it to refresh, refine and reform their minds, even when they have started unprejudiced, and alert for discovery.

Now a still greater mass of individuals are biassed against poetry from the start. Its mere unfamiliarity appals them. Like old-fashioned servants, they keep their lives consistently downstairs in regard to it. Whether vice or virtue, it is not for the likes of them.

Their bolder brothers are ashamed to associate so fantastic a mode of speech with business-like cogitations. Rhyme is all very well in a music hall song; but what an inconceivable nuisance to a man who wishes to be undistracted! And even when not so alienated by ignorance, or the inhuman circumstances of their lives, they may alone be impressionable through some enthusiasm, and thus become exclusive readers of imperialistic or socialistic verse because they are aglow with sympathy for the poet's ideas, and remain immovable by similar or superior beauties not so associated.

In this way many folk enjoy hymns to whom all other poetry is distasteful, or are ravished by limericks who could not be tempted to open a *Golden Treasury*.

Again the kindling eloquence of some critic, the voice and manner of some reader, cause their taste to be passionately espoused: when the same ardent hero-worship

which transplants it may prove the enemy of its further growth. For discipleship will often take a perverse pride in refusing to admire and love, except where it has the warrant of its master's actual example.

All these are kinds of initial bigotries which may easily be so ingrained in a person of fourteen that hardly any upheaval can be conceived which should lay bare the foundations of their humanity to this most congenial of influences, the power of the best poetry.

A third class are those who are meanly corrupt; endowed with a little taste, they have employed it on personal or social ends, instead of desiring to be employed by it in the discovery of excellence. They have sought sentimental consolations or a pick-me-up for enthusiasm, and used and abused this nectar as others use and abuse alcohol.

Or by its means they have tried to shine in society, to pass for cultured people cheaply. Or they have learned to understand and theorise about it in order to teach in a school or give an extension lecture; or, through the weakness of all their other tastes, have drifted into literary criticism or a professorship at a university by way of excusing their existence.

In all these ways taste may be harnessed to a market cart, and trot backwards and forwards on the highway, respected among other respectable trades, but stunted, cowed and gelded.

Now, suppose that all these dangers have been avoided —and there are few walks of life not notably infested by one or another of them—right across the road of progress in good taste there then lies waiting a more terrible ogre, who enslaves great geniuses and starves minds potentially as rich as the Indies. He is that species of vanity which admires what is impertinent or accidental because it is a man's own. All satisfaction with mere cleverness, mere daintiness, mere subtlety, oddity, bravado, bluffness, etc.,

with which fine designs have been teased or disfigured is wound of his dealing. No literature has he scarred more deeply than our English. Shakespeare himself could not defend the grandest poems ever conceived against his barbarity.

"'Be true to your taste,' this mocking giant cries, 'your own taste, not any one else's. Be not overborne by tradition or corrupted by fashion. Dare on your own account and let the ideal take care of itself. What! Correct nature, correct yourself! Amazing nonsense! You are what you are; Nature is what it is. That is all we want to know; all we can admire."

Deluded by this advocate of a specious loyalty to taste, men tie themselves to first thoughts and raw emotions as though these were more essentially their own than thoughts cleared and polished by reflection, or emotion chastened by considerate expression. They will relinquish study in dread of tainting their originality, checking their verve, or confusing their impressions. "I want to put down just what I think, what I feel, nothing more, nothing less," they plead. Alas! had you taken up with that theory in infancy you would be a baby still.

A thriving taste is like a seedling, intensely itself, but determined to be a tree. Its possessor must be loyal to the laws of its growth and provide it with food, light, air. It does not desire instant petrifaction to preserve it from change and inconsistency, but is eager to embrace and attack the unknown in order to obtain new impressions, to arrange and recompose with its own. And as a creator who owns such a taste is constantly recasting, reconsidering and correcting his work, and eschews both haste and lethargy, so an appreciator, whose taste lives, strives after larger comprehension by watching those whom he surmises may possibly possess such; and by sifting and

searching his present judgments he will be constantly reconstructing hierarchies of merit, giving marks, 100 for Shakespeare's best sonnet, a duck's egg for his worst.

Mr Lascelles Abercrombie lately published *The Sale of St Thomas*, a fine poem. He must take up at least half-a-dozen poets and come very near the top of the class. Yet, if in *The Emblems of Love*, which has appeared since, he seems to us to have done but little to secure that pre-eminence, this also should be promptly admitted.

In a definite number of stanzas Mr Herbert Trench's fine gift of a musical style becomes one with felicity of conception. It is worth while to know it, and to be jealous over a single unit more or less. This ceaseless movement and reorganisation of a man's judgment is a condition of the growth of taste, and enables him to look back on bygone admirations with the conviction that those of to-day are stronger, more definite and yield him purer delight.

But improviser and impressionist accept just what happens to be there, and, while they try to record it unaltered by reason or tendency, it dwindles for lack of the nourishment that a purpose and reconsideration would have given it. Impressionism should not be regarded as the practice of a school of painters; this bad habit is as old as Jubal, the father of all such as handle the harp and organ. Even the modern avowed and vainglorious impressionism impoverished the art not only of Whistler, but that of Meredith; nay, it had infected even such a genius as Browning, and all but justifies what Mr Santayana, perhaps the finest literary critic alive, says of him:

"Now it is in the conception of things fundamental and ultimate that Browning is weak, he is strong in the conception of things immediate. The pulse of emotion, the bobbing up of thought, the streaming of reverie—these he

can note down with picturesque force or imagine with admirable fecundity. Yet the limits of such excellence are narrow. For no man can safely go far without the guidance of reason. His long poems have no structure. . . . Even his short poems have no completeness, no limpidity. . . . What is admirable in them is the pregnancy of phrase, vividness of passion and sentiment, heaped-up scraps of observation, occasional flashes of light, occasional beauties of versification, all like—

'The quick sharp scratch
And blue spurt of a lighted match.'

There is never anything largely composed in the spirit of pure beauty, nothing devotedly finished, nothing simple and truly just." [1]

Rossetti called a sonnet "a moment's monument." Fortunately he did not mean all he might have meant by it, and his own sonnets were the result of long hours of meditation, and recast again and again. His phrase, however, epitomises this theory; a moment, not a choice moment, but any single moment, is considered as worthy of an eternal monument. With this end in view the writer is more fortunate than the artist. He may record minute after minute just what words come into his head, till at last none come and his work is finished. And appreciation for such work is acquired in the same manner, by stupefying reason and yielding oneself, like the smoker of opium, to a stream of suggestions.

The out-and-out impressionist would be like a man who should strip his clothes off in order to prove that his honesty needed no disguise, and, when he was naked, must be clapped int an asylum because he had lost his wits. Instead of accumulating resources, the improviser or impressionist whittles them away; though he be rich at the

[1] *Poetry and Religion*, "The Poetry of Barbarism," p. 208.

outstart, he will always be poorer in the end. This process has a widespread fascination even in practical life, as the bankruptcy courts attest. Running downhill begets its proper exhilaration, one moves faster and faster; the invigoration derived from ascending must maintain itself in spite of decreasing speed.

Now not only do the victims of these many maladies of taste which I have enumerated miss sound health, but, by implacable necessity, they become passively or actively, here or there, enemies and maltreaters of poetry, who resist and persecute her best.

Why should we then wonder at the ups and downs of literary history, the blindness of contemporaries, the long-continued bigotry of worthless fashions, or at the lives and misfortunes of poets?

Poetry, as distinguished from prose, is formally rhythmic; and the reason why it is so, is that a majority of the finest mentalities have considered formal rhythms capable of greater beauty. Apart from their beauty, they are simply inconvenient.

Browning compares the ravishing depth and warmth of colour, which Keats discovered the secret of, to Tyrian purple, and says that he flooded the literary market with—

"Enough to furnish Solomon
Such hangings for his cedar-house,
That, when gold-robed he took the throne
In that abyss of blue, the Spouse
Might swear his presence shone

Most like the centre-spike of gold
Which burns deep in the blue-bell's womb,
What time, with ardours manifold,
The bee goes singing to her groom,
Drunken and over-bold."

—stanzas whose beauty is worthy to rank with Keats's own work, and which add to his luxurious richness of

diction a directness and energy of movement such as he has left no example of.

But Browning continues :

" And there's the extract, flasked and fine
And priced and saleable at last !
And Hobbs, Nobbs, Stokes and Nokes combine
To paint the future from the past,
Put blue into their line.

Hobbs hints blue, —straight he turtle eats :
Nobbs prints blue, —claret crowns his cup :
Nokes outdares Stokes in azure feats, —
Both gorge. Who fished the murex up ?
What porridge had John Keats ? " [1]

—stanzas in which the artificial form of verse seems merely to incommode that vigour and directness, so eminently characteristic of Browning, both when he writes poetry and when he distorts prose into its semblance and caricature.

Take another instance of this abuse, from Wordsworth :

" Yes, it was the mountain echo,
Solitary, clear, profound,
Answering to the shouting cuckoo
Giving to her sound for sound.

Unsolicited reply
To a babbling wanderer sent ;
Like her ordinary cry
Like—but oh, how different ! "

These two stanzas enchant the ear, and kindle the mind to joyous receptiveness. But alas ! the poet continues much as the genius of the Salvation Army adapts the tune of a successful music hall song to other words.

" Hears not also mortal life ?
Hear not we unthinking creatures
Slaves of folly, love, and strife—
Voices of two different natures ?

[1] *Browning's Works*, " Popularity," vol. vi., p. 192.

Have not we too?—yes, we have
Answers, and we know not whence;
Echoes from beyond the grave
Recognised intelligence!

Often as thy inward ear
Catches such rebounds, beware!—
Listen, ponder, hold them dear;
For of God,—of God they are."[1]

And one has almost forgotten that he was inspired when he set out. The Muse was responsible for those first delightful stanzas; Mr Wordsworth, philosophical member of the Church of England, for the three last, commendable in many ways but not as poetry, since all they say might have been expressed as well or even better in prose.

Emerson says:

"The thought, the happy image, which expressed it, and which was a true experience to the poet, recurs to the mind, and sends me back in search of the book. And I wish that the poet should foresee this habit of readers, and omit all but important passages. Shakespeare is made up of important passages, like Damascus steel made up of old nails."[2]

It would have been much better if Wordsworth had published his two stanzas and Browning his two, and omitted the rest of their poems. Why did they not?

Emerson shall tell us:

"Great design belongs to a poem and is better than any skill of execution,—but how rare! I find it in the poems of Wordsworth, *Laodamia* and the *Ode to Dion*, and the plan of *The Recluse*. We want design, and do not forgive

[1] *Poems of the Imagination*, xxix.
[2] *Letters and Social Aims*, "Poetry and Imagination," p. 152.

the bards if they have only the art of enamelling. We want an architect and they bring us an upholsterer." [1]

It is this demand that makes the poet shy of proffering his fragment of pure gold, and eggs him on to work it into a statue by adding clay, iron, or anything else which he has handy.

That ode on Dion, which Emerson mentions, set out to be the finest ode in our language, and though less complete, less successful than several of Keats's, it still retains some superiority over them. As a magical treatment of the tragedy of heroism, it stands beside Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, and the scene of the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius in *Julius Cæsar*. That scene Nietzsche considered the grandest in all Shakespeare, on account of the importance and dignity of its theme; and the ode on Dion may claim a similar advantage among other odes.

Wordsworth's subject was not Dion's tragedy, as told by Plutarch, but his own sense of its import: yet he seems to have felt uneasy at not telling the story, and breaks off to paint a preliminary scene; then the might of his true subject seizes him again, and he rushes on to his goal, the events that carry the moral. Now this moral is the most important inference to be drawn from experience, and raises the question about which men will contend longest.

The facts necessary for the comprehension of the poem, but not easily to be deduced from reading it, are that Dion was a finely gifted man and Plato's disciple; had been unjustly exiled, and on his return, coming to the head of affairs, intended to use power ideally, yet permitted the opponent of his government to be illegally put to death; was reproached for this in a vision, and soon after fell a victim to an assassin's knife.

[1] *Letters and Social Aims*, "Poetry and Imagination," p. 153.

In reading, I will omit the division of clay; you can all decide whether I am justified in so doing when you read the poem for yourselves at your leisure.

The beauty of Dion's character and its relation to that of Plato are first compared to a white swan sailing in the light of the moon.

"Fair is the swan, whose majesty, prevailing
O'er breezeless water, on Locarno's lake,
Bears him on while proudly sailing
He leaves behind a moon-illumined wake:
Behold! the mantling spirit of reserve
Fashions his neck into a goodly curve;
An arch thrown back between luxuriant wings
Of whitest garniture, like fir-tree boughs
To which, on some unruffled morning, clings
A flaky weight of winter's purest snows!
—Behold!—as with a gushing impulse heaves
That downy prow, and softly cleaves
The mirror of the crystal flood,
Vanish inverted hill, and shadowy wood,
And pendent rocks, where'er, in gliding state,
Winds the mute Creature without visible mate
Or rival, save the Queen of night
Showering down a silver light,
From heaven, upon her chosen favourite!

So pure, so bright, so fitted to embrace,
Where'er he turned, a natural grace
Of haughtiness without pretence,
And to unfold a still magnificence,
Was princely Dion, in the power
And beauty of his happier hour.
Nor less the homage that was seen to wait
On Dion's virtues, when the lunar beam
Of Plato's genius, from its lofty sphere
Fell round him in the grove of Academe,
Softening their inbred dignity austere—
That he, not too elate
With self-sufficing solitude,
But with majestic lowliness endued,

Might in the universal bosom reign,
And from affectionate observance gain
Help, under every change of adverse fate.

. . . . . .

Mourn, hills and groves of Attica! and mourn
Illisus, bending o'er thy classic urn!
Mourn, and lament for him whose spirit dreads
Your once sweet memory, studious walks and shades!
For him who to divinity aspired,
Not on the breath of popular applause,
But through dependence on the sacred laws
Framed in the schools where Wisdom dwelt retired,
Intent to trace the ideal path of right
(More fair than heaven's broad causeway paved with stars)
Which Dion learned to measure with delight;—
But he hath overleaped the eternal bars;
And, following guides whose craft holds no consent
With aught that breathes the ethereal element,
Hath stained the robes of civil power with blood,
Unjustly shed, though for the public good.
Whence doubts that came too late, and wishes vain,
Hollow excuses, and triumphant pain;
And oft his cogitations sink as low
As, through the abysses of a joyless heart,
The heaviest plummet of despair can go—
But whence that sudden check? that fearful start!
He hears an uncouth sound—
Anon his lifted eyes
Saw, at a long-drawn gallery's dusky bound,
A shape of more than mortal size
And hideous aspect, stalking round and round!
A woman's garb the Phantom wore,
And fiercely swept the marble floor,—
Like Auster whirling to and fro
His force on Caspian foam to try;
Or Boreas when he scours the snow
That skins the plains of Thessaly,
Or when aloft on Mænalus he stops
His flight, 'mid eddying pine-tree tops!

So, but from toil less sign of profit reaping,
The sullen Spectre to her purpose bowed,
Sweeping—vehemently sweeping—
No pause admitted, no design avowed!
'Avaunt, inexplicable Guest!—avaunt,'
Exclaimed the Chieftain—'Let me rather see
The coronal that coiling vipers make;
The torch that flames with many a lurid flake,
And the long train of doleful pageantry
Which they behold, whom vengeful Furies haunt;
Who, while they struggle from the scourge to flee,
Move where the blasted soil is not unworn,
And, in their anguish, bear what other minds have born!'

But Shapes that come not at an earthly call,
Will not depart when mortal voices bid;
Lords of the visionary eye whose lid,
Once raised, remains aghast, and will not fall!
Ye Gods, thought He, that servile implement
Obeys a mystical intent!
Your minister would brush away
The spots that to my soul adhere;
But should she labour night and day,
They will not, cannot disappear;
Whence angry perturbations,—and that look
Which no philosophy can brook!

Ill-fated chief! there are whose hopes are built
Upon the ruins of thy glorious name;
Who, through the portal of one moment's guilt,
Pursue thee with their deadly aim!
O matchless perfidy! portentous lust
Of monstrous crime!—that horror-striking blade,
Drawn in defiance of the Gods, hath laid
The noble Syracusan low in dust!
Shudder'd the walls—the marble city wept—
And sylvan places heaved a pensive sigh;
But in the calm peace the appointed Victim slept,
As he had fallen in magnanimity;

Of spirit too capacious to require
That Destiny her course should change; too just
To his own native greatness to desire
That wretched boon, days lengthened by mistrust.
So were the hopeless troubles, that involved
The soul of Dion, instantly dissolved.
Released from life and cares of princely state,
He left this moral grafted on his Fate:
'Him only pleasure leads, and peace attends,
Him, only him, the shield of Jove defends
Whose means are fair and spotless as his ends.' "[1]

What magnificent language and rhythm! Nevertheless this poem, compared with the *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, may be classed as unknown; yet it contains more and better poetry.

Unfortunately the last three lines, if not clay, are not pure gold; for it is not true that pleasure leads and peace attends, or that the shield of Jove defends the clean-handed hero, and we notice something trite in the enunciation of the thought. Wordsworth should have found it obviously false, since he accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the perfect type. Yet, means fair and spotless as the end proposed are ideal requirements both in art and heroism. The contention that this scrupulousness, the ideal beauty of which is freely recognised, should control business, is probably the hardest bone of contention with which humanity is provided—the one about which every compromise of necessity begs the question.

Brutus, Dion and Samson (who for Milton represented Cromwell) are such tragic figures because the beauty of their heroism became tarnished and ended in failure.

For my fault-finding with Wordsworth I hope you will think I have made amends; I would fain do as much for Browning, but time and capacity fail me for reading his magnificent *Artemis Prologizes*, perhaps the most splendid

[1] *Poems of the Imagination*, xxxii.

120 lines of blank verse in English. I will read one of his successful lyrics instead.

Browning imagines a page-boy in love with a queen, and, while tending her hounds and hawks, complaining of this hopeless passion and overheard by her.

"Give her but a least excuse to love me!
When—where—
How—can this arm establish her above me,
If fortune fixed her as my lady there,
There already, to eternally reprove me?
('Hist!'—said Kate the Queen;
But 'oh!'—cried the maiden, binding her tresses,
''Tis only a page that carols unseen,
Crumbling your hounds their messes!')

"'Is she wronged?—To the rescue of her honour,
My heart!
Is she poor?—What costs it to be styled a donor?
Merely an earth to cleave, a sea to part?
But that fortune should have thrust all this upon her!
('Nay, list!'—bade Kate the Queen;
And still cried the maiden binding her tresses,
''Tis only a page that carols unseen,
Fitting your hawks their jesses!')"[1]

The turn of rhythm on "when—where—how" is so felicitous that it seems madness for a poet to dream of adding another stanza which, as coming second, should be more perfect.

Yet when we read—

"Is she wronged?—To the rescue of her honour,
My heart!
Is she poor?—What costs it to be styled a donor?"—

we breathe free, and glory in his triumph.

Yet this song is not in the *Oxford Book of English Verse*, where under Browning's name several obviously inferior things appear.

[1] *Pippa Passes*, Part II.

Ben Jonson, like Browning, produced a mass of work pregnant with intelligence, but which rarely became pure poetry. However, he, like Browning, yields a handful of perfect things. I will read one:

"See the chariot at hand here of Love,
Wherein my lady rideth!
Each that draws is a swan or a dove,
And well the car Love guideth.
As she goes, all hearts do duty
Unto her beauty
And, enamoured, do wish, so they might
But enjoy such a sight,
That they still were to run by her side
Through swords, through seas, whither she would ride.

Do but look on her eyes, they do light
All that Love's world compriseth!
Do but look on her hair, it is bright
As Love's star when it riseth!
Do but mark, her forehead's smoother
Than words that soothe her!
And from her arched brows, such a grace
Sheds itself through the face,
As alone there triumphs to the life
All the gain, all the good, of the elements' strife.

Have you seen but a bright lily grow,
Before rude hands have touched it?
Have you marked but the fall of the snow
Before the soil hath smutched it?
Have you felt the wool of beaver?
Or swan's down ever?
Or have smelt o' the bud o' the brier?
Or the nard in the fire?
Or have tasted the bag of the bee?
O so white! O so soft! O so sweet is she!"[1]

Palgrave failed to observe the marvellous perfection of this song. It is not in his *Golden Treasury*, which yet

[1] *Underwoods*, iv.

contains so much poor stuff. It is by such felicities as the climax—

"O so white! O so soft! O so sweet is she!"—

that the form of every lyric should be a discovery.

The surprise of this kind that seems to have fallen most directly out of heaven is the line—

"Sad true lover never find my grave"—

from the dirge in *Twelfth Night.*

"Come away, come away, death,
And in sad cypress let me be laid.
Fly away, fly away, breath;
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
Oh, prepare it!
My part of death, no one so true
Did share it.

Not a flower, not a flower sweet,
On my black coffin let there be strown;
Not a friend, not a friend greet
My poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown:
A thousand thousand sighs to save
Lay me, Oh, where
Sad true lover never find my grave
To weep there!"

The difficulty of accounting for the scansion of that disquieted Shakespearean editors for upwards of two hundred years, till at last it was observed that the irregularity was exceedingly beautiful. So easily is the goal of æsthetic research obscured even for men as intelligent as Pope or Capel.

Now, for fear of enervating our taste by an over-constant effort to appreciate what is perfect, let us compare a stanza from the great lyric in Matthew Arnold's *Empedocles*, and one from Browning's much-vaunted *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, with one from Shelley's *To a Skylark.*

"In vain our pent wills fret,
And would the world subdue;
Limits we did not set
Condition all we do;
Born into life we are, and life must be our mould."

Undoubtedly that is a true thought, and expressed with more cogency and clearness than—

"Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, 'A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God; see all nor be afraid!'"

It is obviously more often than not impossible to obey the command to grow old along with any genial old gentleman; it is often, also, untrue that the best is yet to be. No doubt it would be very consoling if experience bore out the old Rabbi; but it does not.

Now listen to Shelley, for the desired, the enchanting, the ever-acceptable accent which creates beauty and joy even out of depression:

"We look before and after
And pine for what is not:
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought."

True. *To a Skylark* treats continually of lovely and agreeable things, but so does Rabbi Ben Ezra; he compares passionate youth with serene old age, and, refurbishing the hackneyed image of the potter and the clay, substitutes for the nondescript "vessel" a Grecian urn. Yet with all these opportunities he never turns a single stanza so beautiful as the most abstract of Shelley's.

The fact is, Browning represents Rabbi Ben Ezra as a prosperous old man enjoying a stately decline, who allows

his after-dinner optimism to get the better of his observation and experience. He is moved by thought, but less conscious of its truth or beauty than of its supposed efficacy for cheering, that is bamboozling: and this purpose of his cannot beget afflatus sufficient to rise to a fine form and movement, so his utterance is outclassed not only by Shelley's, which is beautiful, but by Arnold's, which, though plain, is sincere.

I mentioned that some of the best poetry has been honestly charged with immorality. Such accusations are usually made by people who regard the fact that poets can and often do preach excellent sermons as the only excuse for verse. Now to elucidate this difficulty we must conceive of English morality as something dependent on the customs and habits of the English, not as an absolute criterion of worth. In practical life it is a mistake to run counter to one's neighbours without a weighty reason without being prepared to suffer as a consequence.

But in the realm of contemplation, whither poetry should lift us, morality, instead of being established, is a project.

There, if it is not to prove futile, neither deed nor doer must be left unconsidered, but the whole reality must be harmoniously reviewed. For this reason we should welcome all who can give fine literary form to any accident, however inconvenient that accident may be in a mundane sphere. An unpalatable truth thus becomes associated with beauty—an object for contemplation, yielding refreshment and recreation.

"It is all very well in a book," as people say of extravagant behaviour, implying that in practice it is less pardonable; and what they say is quite true. Only their tone of voice may be disparaging to literature and betray the penury of their taste.

A consequence of this more comprehensive horizon

which poetry demands is that a poem must not only be enthralling by beauty and intensity, but, if it be of any length, by its interest.

Rossetti rightly queried whether a long poem ought not to be as absorbing as a novel. It ought. A novel need only fail of being a poem by that degree of beauty which formal rhythms have over informal. Most novels do fail in many other ways, but many long poems fail just where good novels succeed. It is in vital interest that Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *Lear*, *Hamlet* and *Othello* are so superior to *Paradise Lost*, though that poem perhaps maintains a higher level of beauty than they do.

Can the interest proper to great poems be distinguished from that aroused by imaginative prose? By intensity? Hardly: rather by quality, by perfection. Poetry transports us into its newly created world more delicately, with a finer respect for the bloom of the soul. The superiority is of mood rather than of power. The mind is carried among objects and events with a motion that more nearly satisfies innate desire: even so Zephyros conveyed Psyche from the piled logs on the rocky peak to a lawn in the gardens of Love's house. In like manner dancing contents the body better than walking or running or drilling. In the flight of some birds and in the swimming of certain fish we recognise an ideal smoothness and continuity, but dancing adds to this a conscious ecstasy; skill triumphs over known difficulties, elation lifts the body, which no longer merely serves, but becomes the disinterested vehicle of the soul, its partner and friend. Thus the movement of poetry weds the mind's desire.

Wordsworth found fault with *The Ancient Mariner* because the chief character remains passive, is acted on but does little. Now perhaps he appealed to a traditional error in thus accounting for the small effect produced by the *Lyrical Ballads* when first issued. We are, I think, as a matter of fact, as much interested by what happens

to a man as by what he does. We do not understand the universe; therefore, though we contemplate the actions of men with more intuitive comprehension, more awe and curiosity is aroused by the working of external agencies as it affects men's lives. Science has not yet explained any force, not even those which we intuitively comprehend because we feel them in motion within; the imagination therefore freely lends a conditional credence to stories of spirits and phantoms, and the knowledge that our forbears were fully contented with them powerfully seconds their appeal.

Still the shooting of an albatross remains a trifling action compared with its results and with the length of the poem, and *Hart Leap Well* assuredly treats a like theme with more proportion. Yet small actions sometimes have gigantic effects; a sudden shout may dislodge an avalanche, therefore we cannot regard such proportion as essential to a work of art. The only fault with which I can reproach Coleridge's masterpiece was due to Wordsworth's prompting.

"He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small:
For the dear God, who loveth us,
He made and loveth all."

Though these words come quite convincingly from the old sailor, by their position they seem in part addressed to us by the poet, and acquire a tinge of æsthetic impertinence. Besides their insistence detracts from that passionate fondness for the Albatross which caused the lonely spirit to follow the ship nine fathom deep, by treating his action as a cog in the machinery of providence. Apart from this slight strain introduced at Wordsworth's suggestion, we are lifted and absorbed by the story with a delicate completeness unrivalled by any poem of equal or greater length since written. *Michael* and *The Ruined Cottage*, profoundly organised though they are, attain nothing like

this felicity of movement. Though *Enoch Arden* and *The Ring and the Book* are as interesting as novels, they fali like novels also, the one by lack of the distinction that an utter sincerity gives, the other by lack of the conciseness that the love of beauty dictates. Keats's *Lamia*, Arnold's *Empedocles*, though less absorbing, more nearly marry a considerable interest to a proportionate beauty; *Sohrab and Rustum*, which perhaps does more, yet remains too conscious of Homer's example to escape a certain flavour of pedantry. Again, Mr Yeats's dramas succeed in mingling interest and beauty better than any of those by the Victorian poets; though several, like Browning's *Strafford*, are more powerful, or like Swinburne's *Atalanta*, more original, or like Tennyson's *The Cup*, more theatrical.

We, like the folk of many previous ages, have it dinned into our ears that poetry, to be great, must treat of actual preoccupations, and not harp on any which are as notably neglected as was the ideal of justice in Dante's day. Well, well, let us allow that a most worthy kind of people at present discuss plans for mitigating the evils of social inequality. How does the best poetry treat this problem?

Not in Lloyd George's way, nor yet like Mr and Mrs Webb, nor even like Bernard Shaw. Their ways are, of course, aimed at and achieve a different kind of success. But do they as grandly allay our passions and restore us to as propitious a frame of mind?

The opinions of Byron and Shelley took their cue from the advanced political thinkers of that day, but failed to inspire their loftiest verse. Such themes as personal guilt and loneliness, or some woman, some cloud, a skylark or the healing power of night inspired their happiest flights. They chanted freedom, indeed, but are on this theme outclassed by Wordsworth, who was soon to become a hopeless reactionary. However, a poet never praised for thought conceived our problem in very lovely verse, almost as we realise it to-day.

"With her two brothers this fair lady dwelt
Enrichèd from ancestral merchandize,
And for them many a weary hand did swelt
In torchèd mines and noisy factories,
And many once proud-quiver'd loins did melt
In blood from stinging whip;—with hollow eyes
Many all day in dazzling river stood,
To take the rich-or'd driftings of the flood.

For them the Ceylon diver held his breath,
And went all naked to the hungry shark;
For them his ears gush'd blood; for them in death
The seal on the cold ice with piteous bark
Lay full of darts; for them alone did seethe
A thousand men in troubles wide and dark:
Half-ignorant, they turned an easy wheel,
That set sharp racks at work, to pinch and peel.

Why were they proud? Because their marble founts
Gushed with more pride than do a wretch's tears?—
Why were they proud? Because fair orange-mounts
Were of more soft ascent than lazar stairs?—
Why were they proud? Because red-lined accounts
Were richer than the songs of Grecian years?—
Why were they proud? again we ask aloud,
Why in the name of Glory were they proud?"

That question is so much more winsome than an accusation. What have we, any of us, added to favouring circumstance to warrant pride? Asked not in the name of justice, but of Glory. How universal the difficulty of a reply appears! To rail at tyrants is by comparison as though, when a little girl was naughty, we should scold her dolls; for kings and governors are only the toys of that lust for possessing which makes us all, rich and poor alike, so negligent of nobler things.

Though the first line of *Endymion* has become a proverb and already smells musty, serious people have not acquired the habit of looking for truth in beauty, where the nearest approach to it can be made. They expect and

recommend precisely the opposite course, and approved Lord Tennyson when in *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After* he set the turbid accusations of Carlyle and Ruskin to tuneful numbers, although he failed of Keats's success. Whereas a living poet, never mentioned by those who plume themselves on preoccupation with these problems has, I think, surpassed those slightly rhetorical stanzas in Keats's *Pot of Basil*, which had remained the high-water mark of expression on this theme.

A vision of those who suffer ranged like beggars on either side of the streaming street of active life has come to this poet. Like figures conceived by Rembrandt or Rodin, they appeal to us with patience and resignation, and he bids the nimble-footed crowd gaze on these their fellows whose feet are so slow that from age to age they seem to have advanced no more than statues. For him they are THE STATUES cut out of flesh more enduring than marble, that in spite of change is ever the same in its capacity to suffer.

"Tarry a moment, happy feet
That to the sound of laughter glide!
O glad ones of the evening street,
Behold what forms are at your side!

You conquerors of the toilsome day
Pass by with laughter, labour done;
But these within their durance stay;
Their travail sleeps not with the sun.

They like dim statues without end,
Their patient attitudes maintain;
Your triumphing bright course attend,
But from your eager ways abstrain.

Now, if you chafe in secret thought,
A moment turn from light distress,
And see how Fate on these have wrought,
Who yet so deeply acquiesce.

Behold them, stricken, silent, weak,
The maimed, the mute, the halt, the blind,
Condemned in hopeless hope to seek
The thing which they shall never find.

They haunt the shadows of your ways
In masks of perishable mould :
Their souls a changing flesh arrays,
But they are changeless from of old.

Their lips repeat an empty call,
But silence wraps their thoughts around.
On them, like snow, the ages fall ;
Time muffles all this transient sound.

When Shalmaneser pitched his tent
By Tigris, and his flag unfurled,
And forth his summons proudly sent
Into the new unconquered world ;

Or when with spears Cambyses rode
Through Memphis and her bending slaves,
Or first the Tyrian gazed abroad
Upon the bright vast outer waves ;

When sages, star-instructed men,
To the young glory of Babylon
Foreknew no ending ; even then
Innumerable years had flown,

Since first the chisel in her hand
Necessity, the sculptor, took,
And in her spacious meaning planned
These forms, and that eternal look ;

These foreheads, moulded from afar,
These soft, unfathomable eyes,
Gazing from darkness, like a star ;
These lips, whose grief is to be wise.

As from the mountain marble rude
The growing statue rises fair,
She from immortal patience hewed
The limbs of ever-young despair.

There is no bliss so new and dear,
It hath not them far-off allured.
All things that we have yet to fear
They have already long endured.

Nor is there any sorrow more
Than hath ere now befallen these,
Whose gaze is as an opening door
On wild interminable seas.

O Youth, run fast upon thy feet,
With full joy haste thee to be filled,
And out of moments brief and sweet
Thou shalt a power for ages build.

Does thy heart falter? Here, then, seek
What strength is in thy kind! With pain
Immortal bowed, these mortals weak
Gentle and unsubdued remain."

That I think is first-rate poetry. It does not attribute to human agency what possibly lies beyond its scope, in order either to praise or blame. It recognises that some virtues are almost always the work of adversity, others of prosperity; some proper to youth and health, others to age and suffering; and it is thus considerate while rapt in an ecstasy of contemplation such as can but clothe itself in delightful phrases and felicitous images.

To my mind the stanza about aged stricken folk is the finest:

"There is no bliss so new and dear,
It hath not them far-off allured.
All things that we have yet to fear
They have already long endured"—

while above all the others I prize the two lines—

"She from immortal patience hewed
The limbs of ever-young despair."

Yet while I thus distinguish, I reprove myself for separating them from the wave of five stanzas, of which they form the crest:

"Since first the chisel in her hand
Necessity, the sculptor, took,
And in her spacious meaning planned
These forms, and that eternal look;

These foreheads, moulded from afar,
These soft, unfathomable eyes,
Gazing from darkness, like a star;
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Nor is there any sorrow more
Than hath ere now befallen these,
Whose gaze is as an opening door
On wild interminable seas."

That I think is more successful poetry than any in Browning's *Rabbi Ben Ezra* or in Tennyson's *Locksley Hall*; nay, more successful than any produced by those great poets after the first glorious flush had paled on the forehead of their youthful genius. Is it not well described by Shelley's line—

"Our sweetest songs are those which tell of saddest thought"?

It is the work of Laurence Binyon, and published in his *London Visions.*

Now these are merely my opinions, and should not be adopted by you: nor need they ever become yours, unless your progress towards the distant goal of a perfect appreciation of excellence should happen to lead you over the very same spot where I now stand.

Each one of you is a traveller over these delectable mountains, and not what has delighted me or any other pilgrim brings you on your way and holds off fatigue and depression, but what delights *you.* Only be occupied and ever anew eager in arranging what you admire by order of merit. Examine your preferences, do not rest content with enjoying them, and you will grow aware of niceties and differences in what is admirable that otherwise would have escaped your notice. You will invigorate and render rational what may have seemed the truly mystical fascination which verse exerted over you.

Let me warn you against negative standards. Never record your impressions by enumerating faults, as the newspaper critic so often does. Never accept the absence of apparent flaws as proof of the presence of excellence. Keep to the positive merits and try to define them; merely turn away from what calls for blame. Disparaging warps the mind far worse than over-lauding. Above all, institute comparisons whenever you find two poets treating the same theme or using the same form with felicity to diverse effect, or in any way rivalling one another. Animals see, breathe and feel, man alone discovers, appreciates and admires; it is not enough to passively enjoy; we must create order in our experiences.

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